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## Guiding the Future: How Mentoring Shapes Prospective Teachers during Their Teaching Journey

Dr. Mir Ahmad Shah<sup>1</sup>

Kashif Ullah<sup>2</sup>

Ibne Amin<sup>3</sup>

Dr. Muhammad Shahzeb Gul<sup>4</sup>

## Guiding the Future: How Mentoring Shapes Prospective Teachers during Their Teaching Journey

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| Dr. Mir Ahmad Shah       | Lecturer, Govt Degree College Badaber Peshawar, Higher Education Department, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. ORCID 0000-0001-6054-0808. <a href="mailto:Onlymir@gmail.com">Onlymir@gmail.com</a> |
| Kashif Ullah             | IER, University of Peshawar. ORCID 0009-0009-5073-6909. <a href="mailto:Kashifuop1@gmail.com">Kashifuop1@gmail.com</a>   |
| Ibne Amin                | Research Scholar, Qurtuba University of science and information technology Peshawar. <a href="mailto:ibneamin1433@gmail.com">ibneamin1433@gmail.com</a>                              |
| Dr. Muhammad Shahzeb Gul | E&S Education Department Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. <a href="mailto:Shahzebier@gmail.com">Shahzebier@gmail.com</a>  |

### Abstract

The purpose of this study is to investigate prospective teachers' experiences about Mentoring during teaching practicum. Mentorship represents a vital component in all teacher education programs since their feedback plays an essential role in shaping prospective teachers' professional identity. The quality of feedback and support provided by school and university mentors during their teaching practicum constitutes the focus of this study. The mentor role is vital in skills development and helps prospective teachers adopt the teaching profession. Using a quantitative method, data was collected through an adapted form of EPLEI from 250 prospective teachers enrolled in B.Ed (Hons) at five public sector universities of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan. Findings revealed that prospective teachers widely accepted various support and the key role of mentors during teaching practicum. These include support in content and professional knowledge, classroom management and overall development as a teacher. The study also finds their role in facilitating and socialization of prospective teachers in the school setting. Implications and future recommendations were made at the end of the study.

**Keywords:** Mentor, Mentoring, Coaching, Teaching Practicum, Prospective Teacher, Teacher Education

### INTRODUCTION

Teaching practicum is a core practical component in teacher education programs all over the world, which prepares prospective teachers for real-life teaching. For a successful teaching practicum, there are two major components Mentors and the placement school. The role of Mentors is to provide guidance and support to prospective teachers, while the placement school is the place where teaching practicum takes place. Mentor teachers are professionally trained teacher educators who are well aware of the current trends and issues in education. Mentors have rich experience to help and provide support to prospective teachers, especially in curriculum, classroom management, and teaching (Shah et al., 2021). One of the most significant parts of the teaching practicum is the rapport between mentors and prospective

teachers. Mentoring, as a way of supporting prospective teachers' professional growth, it is an essential element of all teacher training programs, as mentors' feedback shapes prospective teachers' professional identities. Mentoring is a one-on-one relationship in which experienced or senior people volunteers their time to teach, support and encourages another individual (Mena, Faikhamta & Clarke, 2020). Mentoring is a two-way street in which a mentor and a mentee interact. A wise educator, supporter, sponsor, or buddy is referred to as a "mentor." Back to the history, the term mentoring comes from King Odysseus' son Telemachus, who was tasked with providing direction and advice to his people in Homer's ancient Greek tale "The Odyssey," He even saved his life on multiple occasions. Odysseus' son was educated and directed by the mentor. This training encompassed all aspects of his physical, mental, political, social, and administrative lives (Rutherford, 1986).

According to Sasmal and Pande (2018), mentoring can be undertaken in a variety of settings, be focused on a range of aims and theoretical perspectives, and be delivered in a variety of methods with varying lengths and severity. Furthermore, Badia & Clarke (2021) claimed that mentoring techniques are applied in various styles or formats; as a result, mentoring must be viewed from a variety of perspectives.

Munir and Amin (2020) define three archetypes or forms of mentoring supported by facts from several studies: supervision, support, and collaborative self-development. School mentors play an important role in student teachers' competence development and growth during the practicum stage, as they continuously advise and encourage them on their journey to becoming professional teachers. Usually, mentoring experiences are highly valued and beneficial to student teachers; as Munir and Amin (2018) point out, mentees may feel obligated to obey their mentors' directions and opinions even if they disagree with them. Both mentors and mentees should share their points of view based on their own classroom experiences and perceptions through common understanding and discussion in order to be able to portray on and critically evaluate the effectiveness of various classroom situations and experiences from various perspectives. Mentoring entails much more than just mentoring and supervising student teachers' teaching performance in schools during practicum placements. Mentoring helps student instructors develop their pedagogical practice through dialoguing, negotiating ideas, and providing guidance on improving instructional actions (Malik, Mahmood & Jumani 2020). According to the study literature, school mentors can work as role models, supporters, planners of teaching experiences, observers, presenters, advisers, counselors, assessors, and professional peers when it comes to mentoring tasks and functions. Hairon et al. (2020) underline the importance of school mentors' attributes such as encouragement, hearing, sharing, persuading, counseling, being trustworthy, and most importantly, being supportive, in addition to their professional expertise and experiences. Clarke and Mena (2020). also emphasized the relevance of interpersonal and communication skills in effective mentoring in this regard. Even though mentoring duties and responsibilities in pre-service teacher education are a rising research field, more research is needed on the tasks that school mentors are expected to take on during the practicum process in the twenty-first century (Murtagh,2021).

Teaching practicum is the apex of the teacher education program where prospective teachers get real teaching-learning experiences (Shah et al., 2020). Therefore, Student teachers are required to collaborate with their school mentors as the practicum process or experience provides a valuable opportunity to share professional knowledge (Albakri et al., 2021). In their study, Gillett-Swan and Grant-Smith (2020) looked at what student teachers expect from their cooperating teachers and what they really see in practice schools.

Level of collaboration and support offered during practicum placements, revealing that the level of guidance provided by school mentors fell short of the expectations of teacher trainees. Rather, school mentors did not give the level of assistance that the student teachers required. The teaching practicum, on the other hand, should be ongoing. As a result, mentoring is characterized as offering emotional support and counsel to a younger person who is referred to as a protégé by more experienced individuals (Hoben, 2021). There has been much refinement of the term mentoring in contemporary literature. Academic knowledge promotes self-improvement, encourages sensible judgments, and aids the protégé in making transitions (Crețu, 2021). According to other research, the majority of the literature on mentoring as a mate, career counselor, source of information, and intellectual advisor for individual professional progress. Both parties have something to offer and get from one another. Participants in peer mentoring have been found to develop a level of mutual competence, equality, and empathy that is not always present in traditional mentoring relationships (Hickman & Anderson, 2019). Another definition of mentoring is someone who helps a protégé learn something that he or she would have learned poorly, slowly, or not at all if left alone (Dantzer & Perry, 2021).

In comparison to the conventional definition of mentoring, which is a connection in which a dominant, submissive, or peer can share knowledge, expertise, and support. In an organizational sense, "all mentors are neither supervisors nor managers." On the other hand, all effective supervisors and managers should be mentors. Mentoring must become a part of every leader's responsibilities, with a focus on personal growth" (Sampson & Yeomans, 2019). Mentoring consists of various components: a mentor, a protégé, a connection, and a working environment. This atmosphere could be created by the organization, friendship, or family. Given the importance of mentoring, academics have concentrated their efforts on researching it from a supervisory perspective and as a new specialization or career path within the teaching profession (Dutton, Deane & Bullen, 2018). Traditionally, mentoring research has tried to increase interaction between mentoring, provide care and support for the mentee (Mukeredzi, 2017), and establish a professional relationship with the mentee partners (McMorris et al., 2018).

According to Douglas (2017), the mentor instructors who lead and support student teachers and the locations where the experiences take place are critical to the quality of the teaching practice experience; Mentor instructors are crucial in the growth and advancement of student teachers. Mentor teachers are aware of educational difficulties and are glad to help student teachers negotiate the practicum's challenges, particularly in curriculum and classroom

management, because they are practicing professionals. Student teachers will go-to mentors for support during a time when they are both emotionally and physically exhausted (Koyama & Kasper, 2021). The mentor teacher has the biggest influence on the professional development of the student-teacher. This is an enormous duty. The university partnership values the expertise, time, and effort required to make this experience worthwhile for student teachers and mentors.

An atmosphere of professional development and reflection can be created by establishing a setting that supports open and honest discourse, questions, and concerns. Both the mentor and the student-teacher have the potential to succeed (Nye et al., 2021). As a result, the university must ensure that mentor instructors understand their roles in order to assist student teachers effectively throughout their school projects.

Mentoring has a variety of meanings in teacher education, depending on the situation. Mentors are experienced and knowledgeable teachers who guide prospective teachers through their teaching practicum in a particular context. Mentor instructors are always valuable in helping prospective teachers improve their professional skills and adapting to the new school. Mentors help and support prospective teachers by assisting them in avoiding problems and challenges they may face during their teaching practicum. Because of their crucial function, mentors must be open, honest, and trustworthy to their students; their criticism will be beneficial and constructive for future educators, and they will be neutral and even-handed (Redifer, Strode & Webb, 2021).

Mentors act as role models for mentees by supporting them in putting theories into practice and advising and assisting prospective teachers in overcoming challenges that arise during teaching and lesson preparation. Mentors do not always follow through on their commitments. They are harsh and debilitating to potential instructors, and they prevent them from improving their abilities. They are also unprofessional when it comes to providing criticism, and they are gloomy by nature (Ben-Eliyahu et al., 2021).

According to Agarwal et al. (2021) the mentor plays a crucial role in the teaching practicum since he or she is the one who can provide valid and accurate information about the performance and instruction of prospective teachers. Their role is crucial in assisting prospective teachers in improving the quality of their instruction and making it more result-oriented. According to HEC (2012), mentors can set up meetings and dialogues with cooperative teachers, teacher educators, educationists, school principals, and other experienced teachers. They must make the goals of the teaching practicum clear to prospective teachers and arrange regular seminars to address their concerns.

According to Lawson et al. (2015) mentor instructors organize an introductory class covering all teaching areas, including giving a sample lesson during course work, to prepare and acquaint prospective teachers with real-life teaching before they commence their practical teaching. The mentor teacher must act as a facilitator, a psychologist, a general confidence builder, a coach, an appraiser and examiner, and an interpreter of observations (Vo, Pang & Lee, 2018). In addition to the university instructor, cooperating teachers serve as mentors. They are



in charge of honing the skills of future teachers. The mentor's function is critical, and it has a significant impact on the experiences of student teachers. Mentors are also responsible for supporting future teachers with their teaching practicum (Agarwal et al., 2021).

In light of the importance of teaching practicum in teacher education, Gillett-Swan and Grant-Smith (2020) claim that it is full of numerous issues that prospective teachers face worldwide. Faculty members, school teaching and non-teaching professionals, cooperating teachers, and school administrators must collaborate with prospective teachers for the program to be successful. Prospective teachers should be assisted by experienced faculty members of universities and institutions in classroom communication, management, and teaching abilities to understand the teaching-learning phenomena completely (Maddamsetti, 2018).

University supervisors are crucial members of the teacher education program who conduct various jobs and tasks, including providing targeted assistance, individual support, community participation, curricular support, and research for teaching innovation (Lawson et al., 2015). Prospective teachers, university mentors, and collaborating teachers are the main stakeholders in the teaching practicum. These three groups are in charge of potential teachers' school learning experiences, and their roles and responsibilities are carefully defined. If everyone fulfills their commitments and responsibilities, the practicum outcomes will be more satisfying (HEC, 2012; Becker, Waldis, & Staub, 2019). According to Mukeredzi (2017) a teaching practicum is a triangle of a prospective teacher, a collaborating teacher, and a university mentor. The collaboration and instruction of a mentor and cooperative instructors are linked to prospective teachers' learning in classroom scenarios, confronting various hurdles, and requesting aid and guidance. Mentor and collaborating teachers guided their goals, which were addressed with prospective teachers. It is acknowledged that the practicum experiences will be more gratifying if the trio understands what is expected of them. The trio meeting, according to Costache et al. (2019) should be managed to hold numerous times during the teaching practicum, for example, at the commencement of the practicum when each person's rules and duties are discussed, at the midpoint of the practicum when performance is inspected, and at the climax of the practicum when achievement is assessed based on performance. If prospective teachers are having trouble, the trio meeting can occur more regularly than originally recommended (HEC, 2012; Castañeda-Trujillo & Aguirre-Hernández, 2018).

Cooperative teachers who are school-based mentors, support prospective teachers with their professional transition by leading daily work, providing performance feedback, and assisting prospective teachers with their daily work. The cooperating teacher also discusses various concerns, instructional planning, and lesson assessment. The cooperative teacher investigates and reports on the growth and performance of prospective teachers with the support of a mentor teacher. Instructors who collaborate, mentor teachers, and train future educators must have a healthy relationship (Puroila, Kupila & Pekkarinen, 2021; HEC, 2012).

### **SIGNIFICANCE OF THE RESEARCH**

The paper in hands is important because it sheds light on the powerful impact that mentorship has on prospective teachers during their training. Mentorship is not just about helping new teachers develop classroom skills—it's about guiding them to grow personally and professionally, building their confidence and sense of identity as educators. This study can offer valuable insights into how teacher education programs can be improved and how mentoring practices can be enhanced, ensuring that mentors provide the right mix of support, feedback, and encouragement. Strong mentorship can also help bridge the gap between theory and the real challenges teachers face in the classroom, making their transition into teaching smoother and more effective. Moreover, research suggests that good mentoring leads to higher job satisfaction and better teacher retention, which ultimately benefits the entire education system.

### **THE STUDY'S OBJECTIVES**

The study's aims were to know about

- The perception of prospective teachers about mentorship.
- The support provides by mentor teachers during teaching practicum.

### **RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

- What are prospective teachers' experiences about mentor support during teaching practicum?
- What support do Mentors provide to prospective teachers during teaching practicum?

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

In this quantitative study, a descriptive survey design was adopted to examine prospective teachers' perceptions about the role of mentor teachers in their teaching practicum.

An adapted version of the Extended Practicum Learning Environment Inventory (Kennedy, 2006) was used as a data collection tool based on a Likert-type questionnaire. All ethical considerations were taken into account throughout the study, including proper permission from the author of EPLEI.

### **STUDY POPULATION AND STUDY SAMPLE**

This study was conducted in the five public sector universities of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan. All prospective teachers enrolled in B.Ed. (Hons) were constituted the study population. There was a total of 575 enrolled prospective teachers (228 male, 347 female) in the five public sector universities of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan. The study sample comprised 250 prospective teachers (112 male and 138 female) selected through random sampling. All the participants were students of the fourth semester and beyond.

### **RELIABILITY AND VALIDITY OF THE INSTRUMENT**

EPLEI was given to 30 aspiring teachers to assess the research instrument's reliability and validity. The data acquired during the piloting was evaluated using SPSS version (20), and the tool's overall reliability was 0.89. The study's instrument was improved in cooperation with relevant specialists and re-tested on the same subjects based on input from prospective instructors. The updated tool's dependability was determined to be 0.91 for all items, indicating

that it is acceptable for obtaining the needed information. A group of professionals in the subject double-checked the tool as well. The study's instrument was deemed legitimate by all ten experts for gathering the needed data.

#### **DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS**

The researcher visited all selected respondents and administered EPLEI after receiving consent from the relevant educational authorities. The researcher briefly discussed the aim of the study, ethical issues, and the contents of the research instrument before administering it. All individuals gave their prior agreement to participate in the study. As previously stated, PTs were asked to offer their view on various assertions of response using the Likert Scale. The mean values (MVs) of PTs' opinions were calculated, and weight was assigned based on the following criteria: most frequent practice ( $4.5 \leq MV \leq 5$ ), frequent practice ( $3.5 \leq MV \leq 4.5$ ), infrequent practice ( $2.5 \leq MV < 3.5$ ), rare practice ( $1.5 \leq MV < 2.5$ ) and never practiced ( $0.0 \leq MV < 1.5$ ).

**TABLE 1: MOST FREQUENT AND FREQUENT ACTIONS OF MENTORS DURING TEACHING PRACTICUM**

| Item | Actions                    | Mean | $\chi^2$<br>p-value | DF |
|------|----------------------------|------|---------------------|----|
| i    | Emotional Support          | 4.98 | 100.3<br>0.000      | 4  |
| ii   | Helpful in Lesson Planning | 4.97 | 194.8<br>0.000      | 4  |
| iii  | Shared Lesson Ideas        | 4.76 | 90.8<br>0.000       | 4  |
| iv   | Encouraged for Innovation  | 3.83 | 84.5<br>0.000       | 4  |
| v    | Regular Evaluation         | 4.86 | 58.4<br>0.000       | 4  |
| vi   | Classroom Management       | 3.92 | 96.9<br>0.000       | 4  |

The summary of prospective teachers' responses about most frequent and frequent actions against various statements regarding mentor role during teaching practicum is presented in Table 1. The analysis of the data indicated that prospective teachers responded about five areas of mentoring were at the frequent or most frequent level ( $3.5 \leq MV \leq 5$ ), namely "always supportive (MV=4.98), helpful in lesson planning (MV=4.97), Shared lesson ideas (MV=4.76), encouragement for teaching innovation (MV=3.83), Regular evaluation (MV=4.86) and Classroom Management (MV= 3.92).



**TABLE 2: RARE AND NEVER PRACTICED ACTIONS OF MENTORS DURING TEACHING PRACTICUM**

| Item | Actions                                 | Mean | $\chi^2$<br>p-value | Df |
|------|---|------|---------------------|----|
| i    | Care about the Quality of Teaching      | 2.21 | 75.2<br>0.000       | 4  |
| ii   | Continuous Meeting                      | 2.00 | 89.2<br>0.000       | 4  |
| iii  | Communicated Clear Guidelines           | 2.12 | 96.6<br>0.000       | 4  |
| iv   | Involvement in Co-Curricular Activities | 1.89 | 69.9<br>0.000       | 4  |
| v    | Help in Developing Portfolio            | 1.66 | 117.9<br>0.000      | 4  |
| vi   | Discussion Over Progress                | 1.25 | 80.7<br>0.000       | 4  |

In table no two, the summary of prospective teachers' responses about rare and never practiced actions against various statements regarding mentor role during teaching practicum is presented. The analysis of the data indicated that prospective teachers responded about six areas of mentoring were recorded at Rare and Never Practiced level ( $0.0 \leq MV \leq 2.5$ ), namely "caring about teaching quality (MV=2.21), Continuous meeting (MV=2.00), communicated clear guidelines (MV=2.12), Involvement in Co-curricular activities (MV=1.89), Help in developing portfolio (MV=1.66) and Discussion over progress (MV= 1.25).

**TABLE 3: INFREQUENT PRACTICE OF MENTORS DURING TEACHING PRACTICUM**

| Item | Statement                                    | Mean | $\chi^2$<br>p-value | Df |
|------|--|------|---------------------|----|
| i    | Felt Pressure                                | 3.42 | 88.1<br>0.000       | 4  |
| ii   | Support in Maintaining Order and Discipline  | 3.12 | 167.1<br>0.000      | 4  |
| iii  | Time Management                              | 2.98 | 198.01<br>0.000     | 4  |
| iv   | Appropriate Use of Supportive Materials      | 2.76 | 145.1<br>0.000      | 4  |
| v    | Understanding of Curriculum Policy Documents | 3.76 | 167.09<br>0.000     | 4  |
| vi   | Content Knowledge                            | 2.65 | 188.7<br>0.000      | 4  |

The third table depicts the infrequent practices revealed by prospective teachers regarding mentor actions during teaching practicum. The analysis of the data indicated that prospective teachers responded about six areas of mentoring were Infrequent Practices ( $2.5 \leq MV < 3.5$ ) including, Felt pressure ( $MV=3.42$ ), Support in maintaining order and discipline ( $MV=3.12$ ), Time management ( $MV=2.98$ ), Appropriate use of Supportive Materials ( $MV=2.76$ ), Understanding of curriculum policy documents ( $MV=3.76$ ), and Content knowledge ( $MV=2.65$ ).

### **CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION**

Teaching practicum is a vital component of teacher education, while the mentor is one of its core elements. Effective mentoring can make the teaching practicum fruitful and can be helpful in achieving the desiring outcome. According to the study results, it is clear that prospective teachers get various kinds of support from their mentors, including emotional, pedagogical and personal support, which are very productive and helpful in their professional growth. The findings are highly correlated with studies conducted in different research settings, such as Lammert, DeWalt, and Wetzel (2020) and Ellis, Alonzo and Nguyen (2020) found that mentoring support helps student teachers to overcome the teaching practicum and classroom challenges. Mentors are the source who provide not only basic teaching skills to the group of prospective teachers but also introduce the practice teaching applications in terms of expectations and requirements. Martínez (2016) found that besides general support, mentors need to support student teachers in non-teaching tasks in the school. Mukeredzi (2017) and Kang (2021) found that mentors need to be focused on mentoring practices, including addressing the professional needs of the prospective teachers and understanding the mutual benefits of prospective mentoring teachers during practice teaching. Although mentors generally understand the concept of 'mentoring' in schools and universities, the stalk holders can enhance the roles and responsibilities of mentor teachers in supporting student teachers by offering ongoing workshops and keeping contact with the mentor teachers.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Universities should invest more time and resources towards developing a pool of Mentor teachers to assist student teachers during their placement in schools. The mentor should focus on the overall development of prospective teachers thorough out their practicum. For effective mentoring, each mentor should be assigned a limited number of mentees in school.

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