

Mentorship in Action: Reflecting on the Role of Undergraduate Practice Teaching in Nepal's Teacher Education Programs

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the role of mentorship in undergraduate practice teaching within Nepal's teacher education programs, focusing on how mentorship impacts student teachers' professional development. The research adopts a qualitative phenomenological approach to understand the lived experiences of mentors and student teachers in a real-world setting. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with four mentors from schools in Kailali District, Nepal. The findings highlight the challenges and opportunities presented by practice teaching, with a particular emphasis on mentor involvement and the development of key teaching competencies among student teachers. Results indicate that while practice teaching is critical for bridging the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application, it often faces challenges such as insufficient mentor engagement and limited institutional support. The study emphasizes the importance of experienced subject teachers in shaping student teachers' pedagogical skills and the need for structured mentorship programs. Furthermore, the integration of technology in practice teaching is identified as a key factor in preparing student teachers for modern classrooms. This research contributes to the understanding of mentorship dynamics in teacher education, offering practical recommendations for enhancing the effectiveness of practice teaching programs in Nepal and similar educational contexts.

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Introduction

Practice teaching is a critical phase in the preparation of future educators, especially within Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.) programs. Following the completion of theoretical coursework, students engage in an internship where they apply their academic learning to real-life classroom situations. This phase, also known as practice teaching or internship, is designed to equip student teachers with professional skills, teaching methods, and classroom management techniques essential for effective teaching in their careers. Research has demonstrated that practice teaching plays a vital role in bridging the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application. According to Oksana et al. [1], the time spent in real teaching

environments significantly impacts the professional development of student teachers by providing them with a realistic understanding of the challenges and responsibilities of teaching. Furthermore, Weller et al. [2] asserts that practice teaching is not merely an academic requirement but a transformative experience that shapes the professional identity of future educators. Additionally, scholars like Mahdi [3] highlight the importance of practice teaching in developing not only technical skills but also the personal traits necessary for teaching, such as patience, adaptability, and effective communication. These skills are crucial in preparing student teachers for the evolving demands of modern education systems, which increasingly require teachers to be adaptable and capable of integrating technology into their practices.

However, despite its significance, the effectiveness of practice teaching is often compromised by various challenges. For instance, some institutions are criticized for insufficient engagement with experienced subject teachers, which limits the opportunities for student teachers to gain mentorship. Moreover, while practice teaching should be a comprehensive preparation for the teaching profession, it is sometimes reduced to a mere formal requirement, without sufficient attention to developing the skills required for effective teaching. In this context, the role of mentors becomes indispensable. According to Mbhiza et al. [4], the beliefs and practices of mentor teachers significantly influence the learning experiences of student teachers. Mentors, through their guidance, can facilitate the development of essential teaching skills and help student teachers transition from theory to practice. Li et al. [5] further emphasizes that teachers' beliefs shape their classroom practices and thus influence how effectively student teachers learn during their practice teaching.

This study aims to explore the experiences of mentors involved in the practice teaching of B.Ed. students in Nepal, focusing on the role of mentors, the challenges faced by student teachers, and the effectiveness of practice teaching programs. By examining these experiences, the research seeks to provide insights into how practice teaching can be improved to better prepare future educators for the complexities of the teaching profession.

Methods

Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative research design, utilizing a phenomenological approach to explore the lived experiences of mentors in the practice teaching of undergraduate students in Nepal. A qualitative approach was deemed most appropriate as it allows for an in-depth understanding of the participants' perceptions and experiences, as highlighted by Lim [6], who asserts that qualitative methods are particularly suited for exploring phenomena in natural settings.

Phenomenology, in particular, enables researchers to focus on the meaning that individuals assign to their experiences [7]. By employing this method, we aim to gain insights into how mentors perceive the effectiveness of practice teaching, the challenges faced by student teachers, and the overall development of teaching skills during the internship period. This approach is consistent with previous studies, such as Izadinia [8], who highlights phenomenology as an effective strategy for examining subjective experiences.

Sampling and Participants

Purposive sampling was used to select participants who could provide valuable insights into the research topic. The study involved four mentors (referred to as P1, P2, P3, and P4) from schools in Kailali District, Nepal. These mentors were selected based on their extensive experience in guiding student teachers during their practice teaching internships. As noted by Campbell [9], purposive sampling ensures that the participants are directly relevant to the research question and possess the required knowledge to provide meaningful contributions to the study.

The mentors were chosen for their expertise in the field of education and their involvement in the practice teaching process, ensuring that they could offer in-depth perspectives on the subject. This selection criterion aligns with the approach used by Manderstedt et al. [10], who selected experienced mentors to understand the dynamics between student teachers and mentors in a practical teaching context.

Data Collection

Data collection was conducted through semi-structured interviews, which provided flexibility to explore participants' responses in depth while ensuring that key topics were covered. Semi-structured interviews are widely regarded as an effective method for qualitative research, as they allow for both predetermined questions and the opportunity for participants to express their views freely [11]. Each interview was guided by a set of interview questions developed to explore the participants' experiences, perceptions, and observations related to practice teaching. The interviews were audio-recorded with the consent of the participants, and field notes were taken to capture non-verbal cues and additional observations during the interviews. According to Chand [12], the use of both audio recording and field notes enhances the richness of data and ensures a comprehensive understanding of the participants' experiences.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using thematic analysis, a method that involves identifying patterns or themes within qualitative data [13]. This approach was chosen because of its flexibility and suitability for exploring the subjective experiences of participants in detail. Thematic analysis allowed for the identification of common themes related to the mentorship process, challenges faced by student teachers, and the overall effectiveness of practice teaching. The analysis followed a step-by-step process, starting with familiarization with the data through transcription and listening to the audio recordings. After initial coding, the data were categorized into key themes based on the research questions and the emerging patterns. This process was supported by an interpretive paradigm, as described by Belete et al. [14], which allowed the researchers to make sense of the participants' lived experiences and interpret them within the broader context of teacher education and practice teaching. The analysis was conducted collaboratively by the researchers, with regular discussions to ensure the validity and reliability of the findings. This process aligns with the recommendations of Riazi et al. [15], who emphasizes the importance of collaborative analysis to minimize researcher bias and enhance the credibility of the results.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval for the study was obtained from the relevant institutional review board, ensuring that the research adhered to ethical standards in qualitative research. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, and confidentiality was maintained throughout the study. Participants were assured that their responses would remain anonymous and that they had the right to withdraw from the study at any time without consequence. This approach follows the ethical guidelines set out for conducting research with human participants.

Results and Discussion

Actual Responsibility of the Campus Toward Student Teachers' Development

In this study, one of the key themes that emerged from the data was the actual responsibility of the campus toward the development of student teachers during their practice teaching. The findings suggest that while the campuses are formally responsible for the practice teaching process, there is a lack of active engagement and oversight, which hinders the professional growth of student teachers.

P1, one of the mentors, highlighted that the campus must ensure student teachers are fully accountable for their actions during practice teaching, and internal supervisors must play a crucial role in monitoring and guiding the students' progress. According to P1: *"The campus is the major factor to orient its student teachers in the right direction. Student teachers need to be made responsible by the campus and need to evaluate them based on their presence and activities in the schools they are assigned to."*

The absence of strong institutional support and insufficient engagement from internal supervisors were identified as barriers to developing student teachers into competent professionals. This finding aligns with Rinfret et al. [16], who emphasizes the importance of active campus involvement in the mentorship process. Furthermore, the lack of clear responsibility by the campus suggests that practice teaching has become a mere formality rather than an integral part of teacher preparation.

Connecting Student Teachers with Experienced Subject Teachers

Another prominent theme identified in the study was the necessity of connecting student teachers with experienced subject teachers. The mentors consistently reported that subject teachers are vital resources for the professional development of student teachers. These experienced teachers serve not only as knowledge providers but also as mentors who model effective teaching techniques.

P2 noted the importance of subject teachers in the development of student teachers: *"Student teachers have to follow the good systems. There are different skilled teachers in the schools. They require gaining subjective knowledge, which they get through the textbooks and experienced teachers."*

Mentor P3 also reinforced this idea by mentioning that subject teachers are integral in enhancing student teachers' practical knowledge and skills. By working closely with experienced teachers, student teachers can learn pedagogical techniques and strategies, which they can then apply in their own teaching practice.

This finding echoes the work of Setiono et al. [17], who discusses how interaction with experienced teachers significantly influences the development of student teachers' teaching methods. Establishing stronger connections between student teachers and subject teachers would help bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application, enhancing the quality of practice teaching.

Technology-Friendly and Rewarding Concepts for Better Performers

In the contemporary educational landscape, technology plays an increasingly significant role in the teaching-learning process. As the findings suggest, there is a growing need for student teachers to be well-versed in educational technologies to enhance their teaching practices. Several mentors emphasized the importance of technology in preparing student teachers for the demands of modern classrooms.

P2 shared the following view on the importance of technology integration: *"At present, student teachers need to get the concept of think, ink, and link. They have to be able to do power point presentations because they belong to the new generation. They have to maintain a generation gap. They have to apply the technology in the classroom."*

It was observed that student teachers who were technology-savvy were more likely to engage in effective classroom interactions and foster a more dynamic learning environment. The mentors pointed out that the ability to use technology was not just an academic skill but also an essential pedagogical tool that could make the learning process more engaging and efficient. This insight aligns with research by Laabidi [18], who discusses the importance of integrating ICT in teacher education programs to prepare student teachers for future classrooms. Furthermore, the study highlighted that the reward system, such as recognizing and rewarding those who perform well, can motivate student teachers to enhance their skills and adopt a more professional approach.

A Great Opportunity for Student Teachers' Practical Learning

The practice teaching period is considered a significant opportunity for student teachers to gain hands-on, real-world experience. As mentors pointed out, this is the stage where student teachers move beyond theoretical knowledge and start applying teaching methodologies in actual classrooms. The opportunity to practice teaching in a real setting was seen as invaluable by the mentors, who noted that this experience helps student teachers develop practical skills, such as classroom management, lesson planning, and student interaction.

P4 emphasized the practical nature of practice teaching: *"Practice teaching is good because it is important for learning professional requirements in the field of teaching. It also helps student teachers obtain the ways for teaching and learning activities. It is an internship in which student teachers accumulate vision and action-related activities for practice teaching."*

The data collected suggests that student teachers found the practical aspect of the internship phase to be both challenging and rewarding. It allowed them to refine their teaching practices, manage classroom behavior, and engage with diverse student needs. This finding supports the arguments put forth by Gil-Madrona et al. [19], who found that practice teaching serves as a critical step in transitioning from theoretical knowledge to practical application in the classroom.

Moreover, the study highlights that the practical experiences gained during this period are essential in helping student teachers build confidence and develop a professional identity as future educators.

Challenges in the Effectiveness of Practice Teaching

Despite the positive aspects of practice teaching, the study also uncovered several challenges that undermine its effectiveness. The mentors identified a lack of sufficient time and resources dedicated to practice teaching as major obstacles. They also pointed out that the traditional approach to practice teaching, which is focused more on fulfilling academic requirements rather than fostering professional growth, limits its potential impact on student teachers' development.

The mentors expressed concern about the insufficient involvement of experienced teachers in mentoring student teachers, which further exacerbates these challenges. As P3 stated: *"Student teachers are mostly traditional and just try to make the teaching practice normative. They are not actively engaging with the curriculum or the students in a meaningful way."*

This limitation points to the need for more comprehensive and structured mentorship programs that go beyond the basic requirements of practice teaching. As suggested by Cojorn et al. [20], increasing the involvement of experienced teachers and ensuring a more collaborative approach between universities and schools can help overcome these challenges and make practice teaching a more impactful experience.

Discussion

In this study, the findings shed light on several critical aspects of practice teaching and the role of mentors in the development of student teachers. The results revealed a complex interplay between campus responsibility, mentor engagement, technology integration, and the overall experience of student teachers. These insights offer a deeper understanding of how practice teaching can be more effectively structured to benefit future educators.

The lack of active involvement from the campus in supporting student teachers, as observed in this study, is a crucial finding. Previous research supports the idea that effective practice teaching requires strong institutional support. For example, Umami et al. [21] highlighted that university involvement is integral for fostering a productive teaching practice experience, as it not only ensures accountability but also provides the necessary resources and mentorship to student teachers. Without such support, the practice teaching experience risks becoming a formal requirement rather than a developmental opportunity. This aligns with the view that the primary role of the campus should be to ensure that student teachers are held accountable for their professional growth, as P1 suggested in this study.

Mentor involvement also emerged as a key factor in the success of practice teaching. The mentors in this study emphasized the need for student teachers to work closely with experienced subject teachers, who can offer valuable insights into pedagogical techniques and classroom management. This supports the work of Cheng et al. [22], who found that interaction with experienced teachers was essential for student teachers to translate theoretical knowledge into practical teaching skills. However, the study also found that many student teachers were not fully utilizing the potential of this mentorship, primarily due to the lack of structured

connections between student teachers and subject teachers. This gap underscores the importance of more structured and sustained mentoring relationships, as suggested by Beijaard et al. [2], who argued that mentor support is pivotal in shaping the professional identity and teaching practices of student teachers.

In addition, the role of technology in practice teaching emerged as a critical area for development. As the study found, student teachers' technological proficiency was often inadequate, despite the growing importance of digital tools in modern education. This finding resonates with Masykur et al. [23], who emphasized the need for student teachers to be well-versed in educational technology to enhance their teaching effectiveness. The mentors in this study also pointed out that student teachers should be encouraged to integrate technology into their teaching practice, as it not only improves the learning experience but also aligns with current pedagogical trends. Given the rapid advancement of educational technologies, future teacher training programs must prioritize technological fluency to ensure that student teachers are adequately prepared for the demands of the modern classroom.

The study also highlighted the significant role of practice teaching as an opportunity for student teachers to acquire practical skills. While the importance of this hands-on experience is widely recognized, the study's findings suggest that many student teachers did not fully leverage the opportunity to develop their teaching skills. This observation aligns with the findings of Mai Phuc [24], who argued that practice teaching should serve as a bridge between theory and practice, allowing student teachers to refine their teaching methods and classroom management strategies. However, the lack of engagement and responsibility on the part of both student teachers and their institutions undermines the potential impact of this experience [25].

The novelty of this study lies in its focus on the experiences of mentors, providing valuable insights into the practice teaching process from those directly involved in guiding student teachers. While previous studies have largely concentrated on the experiences of student teachers themselves, this research fills a gap by exploring how mentors perceive their role and how they can contribute to improving the effectiveness of practice teaching. This perspective is crucial for understanding the broader dynamics of the practice teaching experience, particularly in regions like Nepal, where educational practices and teacher preparation programs are undergoing significant reforms and enhancing discourses in classes to maintain interaction and create learner autonomy in Nepalese academia [26], [27].

The implications of this study are far-reaching. For educational institutions, it is essential to recognize the importance of providing continuous and meaningful support to student teachers. Campuses should develop structured mentorship programs, foster stronger connections between student teachers and experienced subject teachers, and ensure that internal supervisors are actively involved in the development of student teachers. Additionally, integrating technology into practice teaching should be a priority, with a focus on equipping student teachers with the necessary skills to use digital tools effectively in the classroom. Finally, future research should explore the perspectives of student teachers themselves to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the challenges and opportunities they face during practice teaching. By addressing these areas, the quality of teacher preparation programs can be enhanced, ultimately contributing to the development of more competent and confident educators.

The limitations of this study include its small sample size, consisting of only four mentors from a single district in Nepal, which may limit the generalizability of the findings. Additionally, the study focused solely on the perspectives of mentors, without incorporating the views of student teachers or school administrators, which could provide a more comprehensive understanding of the practice teaching process. The use of qualitative interviews as the only data collection method also introduces the potential for interviewer and participant biases, which may affect the interpretation of the findings. Furthermore, the study's focus on Nepalese practice teaching may limit its applicability to other contexts, suggesting the need for comparative studies in different regions or countries. Despite these limitations, the study offers valuable insights into practice teaching and sets the stage for future research in this area.

Conclusion

This study highlights the critical role of mentors and institutional support in shaping the effectiveness of practice teaching for student teachers. While practice teaching offers valuable opportunities for professional development, the findings underscore the need for stronger engagement from both campuses and experienced subject teachers to ensure that student teachers are adequately prepared for their future careers. The study also emphasizes the importance of integrating technology into the teaching process, which is increasingly essential in modern classrooms. Despite challenges such as insufficient mentor involvement and the lack of structured mentorship programs, the research suggests that practice teaching remains a crucial bridge between theory and practice. To improve the quality of teacher preparation programs, it is essential to strengthen campus responsibility, enhance mentorship practices, and prioritize the integration of technology, thus ensuring that student teachers gain the necessary skills and confidence to succeed in their teaching careers.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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