

STUDENT TEACHERS PERCEPTIONS ON EFFECTIVENESS OF SCHOOL INTERNSHIP

Dr. Kanwalpreet Kaur*

Abstract

The school internship program is to engage students in service activities primarily for providing them with hands-on experience that enhances their learning of issues relevant to teaching. The present study is a descriptive survey that aimed to assess the perceptions of 77 student teachers of four years B.A/ B.Ed. integrated program for the school internship program. Data was collected by using a five-point Likert scale and focused group discussions. Student teachers viewed the school internship program as a real opportunity to refine and improve their teaching skills and mentor teachers played an important role in enhancing their teaching skills. Student teachers were found to be highly satisfied with the dimensions of professional and institutional socialization; socio-emotional aspects; and professional identity and vocational competencies. For learning and professional development, interns viewed that more opportunities be provided to them for the usage of a variety of teaching-learning materials and teaching methods. Student teachers were not satisfied with the support and supervision provided during the internship as no demonstration lessons were delivered and there was a lack of coordination between mentor teacher and university supervisor. In the focussed group discussions, student teachers highlighted the need for availability of good teaching resources in schools and their involvement in all activities of the school. The challenges perceived by mentor teachers were non-availability of written guidelines.

Keywords: School internship program; Integrated teacher education program; Student teachers; and Dimensions of the school internship program.

About Author : *Assistant Professor, IETVE, Panjab University, Chandigarh.

Introduction

Teaching is an exciting and rewarding activity and it's always a very demanding profession. In our complex and highly ambitious society, teaching is not expected to be repeating what teachers had already learned instead of being creative in imparting what they already know, design and invent the curriculum by keeping individual differences in consideration. The matter that how teacher preparation should take place has been one of the most vigorously debated issues throughout the history of formal teacher education (Zeichner, 2010).

Quality teacher education programs require field placements to give opportunities to student teachers to experience the context of their career, to watch and learn from experts in the field, to understand more of the workplace culture into which they are entering and to demonstrate their transferability of theory into

practice (Zeichner, 2006). If the literature and folklore of teacher education agree on one point, it is that the student teaching experience or practicum is important. No teacher education program can be said to be complete without an effective student teaching practice program (National Open University of Nigeria, 2008).

For all pre-service training courses, an internship is one of the best ways of balancing academic learning with the practical skills necessary for ensuring success in a chosen field. The internship is a kind of experiential learning, traditionally acquired through vocational training in the form of apprenticeships that were used as a pathway for students of a specific trade to get into a trade guild (Jackel, 2011). The internship provides opportunities for learners to connect theory to practice within the context of the learning environment (Havard, Morgan, & Patrick, 2010).

In India, with the implementation of

RTE- Act (2010) in a complex, multicultural and multilingual classrooms of India, it became inevitable to bring reformation in the manner of teacher preparation and adorn them with sufficient practice during an internship where they will be conversant to find the answer of “Are we teaching children”? or “Are we teaching the curriculum”?

In this regard, the National Council of Teacher Education (NCTE) in its regulations of 2014, attempted to broaden the scope of practice-teaching by emphasising the importance of providing the experience of all activities and programs of the school to the student-teachers. Further, NCTE has stipulated strengthening of the component of 'field engagement' by prescribing a longer duration of 20 weeks for it in the four-year integrated teacher education program i.e. B.A./ B.Sc. B.Ed. This field engagement of 20 weeks in the four years integrated B.A./ B.Sc. B.Ed. program has been further split into three parts consisting of 2 weeks in the fourth semester; 2 weeks in the sixth semester; and 16 weeks in the eighth semester.

Internship in teaching includes practice teaching and a wide variety of field experiences under the guidance of a competent or expert supervisor. The learner tests her/his theoretical understanding acquired through pedagogy classes in the field during the internship. The intern shares all the significant experiences going on in the school environment and develops meaningful skills and attitudes towards the profession. A partial teaching load allows interns to become involved in as many aspects of school life as possible and every effort is made to prepare teacher interns, both academically and psychologically, for the task ahead.

As per School Internship Framework and Guidelines (2016) of NCTE, the initial teacher preparation including organization of school internship shall be the joint responsibility of the Teacher Education Regulator at the Central level, State Education Departments, Affiliating Bodies, Teacher Education Institutions and Internship schools

and they have to function in a coordinated manner with pre-defined and suitably demarcated responsibilities. The supervision and assessment of the student teacher's performance and achievements at different stages during the school internship shall be coordinated jointly by the teacher education faculty, school principals and mentor teachers. Fletcher (1990) indicated that internship experiences enhance students' self-confidence, values and attitudes and lead to an increase in student independence, social maturity and interpersonal skills. Sahin and Serkan (2009) reported that the internship provides opportunities to interns to observe instructional procedures used by the mentor teacher and a variety of teaching strategies more frequently. Schoeman and Mabunda (2012) concluded that teaching internship increased successes of intern teachers about the teaching profession in terms of personal, professional, social and/or financial fulfilment and high levels of confidence in their vocation as teachers. Otara (2014) highlighted that internship provides an opportunity to integrate theory and practice in teaching which helped student teachers to plan and deliver lessons properly as interns can critically analyse their own and peers teaching styles.

But, Qazi, Rawat, Sharjeel and Devi (2008) argued that the current teaching practice component was found to be inappropriate due to its short duration, inadequate supervision and it produces little standard than expected. Whereas Singh, Ahmad, Pandey and Singh (2012) observed that all teaching skills are not given proper attention by supervisors during internship and teacher educators need to be trained and educated to supervise practice teaching program. Endeley (2014) and Furey (2014) suggested that practicum experience should be of a longer duration to delve student teachers into the full role of a teacher. Supervision and duration are important in ensuring the quality of pre-service teacher education.

The internship is conceived as a professional learning bridge between the end of

pre-service professional preparation and the first year of teaching. It is an extended school-based placement in which interns are expected to consolidate their knowledge and experience across all facets of the role of the teacher in the school under the guidance of a competent or expert supervisor.

2.0. Objectives

- To identify professional and personal difficulties perceived by student teachers during the school internship program.
- To assess the perceptions of student teachers' regarding the adequacy of learning experiences, acquiring of pedagogic competencies and knowledge during the school internship program.
- To study the perceived effect of a school internship program on the socio-emotional aspects of student teachers.
- To estimate perceived satisfaction levels of student teachers concerning the support and supervision provided by the school and university supervisors during the school internship program.
- To study the perceived effect of school internship program on the professional identity and vocational competencies of student teachers.

3.0. Research Questions:

- What are the social, professional and personal difficulties perceived by student teachers during the school internship program?
- What are the perceptions of student teachers' regarding the adequacy of learning experiences, acquiring of pedagogic competencies and knowledge during the school internship program?
- What is the perceived effect of the school internship program on the socio-emotional aspects of student teachers?
- What are the perceived satisfaction levels of student teachers concerning the support and supervision provided by the school and university supervisors during the school internship program?
- What is the perceived effect of the school

internship program on the professional identity and vocational competencies of student teachers?

4.0. Method and procedure of the study

- **Method:** A descriptive survey method was used to ascertain the effectiveness of the school internship program through perceptions of student teachers' regarding various aspects of the school internship program.
- **Sample:** Participants of the study were 77 student teachers of session 2017-18 (38 student teachers) and 2018-19 (39 student teachers) of four years integrated program B.A. B.Ed. running in the Institute of Educational technology and Vocational education, Panjab University, Chandigarh. All the participants had completed 20 weeks of school internship program.
- **Tools used for data collection:** A Likert scale consisting of 37 items were used for the collection of quantitative data from student teachers. The scale was developed on five different dimensions of school internship program based on the Inventory of Experiences and Perceptions at Teaching Practice (IEPTP) designed by Caires and Almeida (2005) namely the professional and institutional socialization; learning and professional development; socio-emotional aspects; support and supervision; and professional identity and vocational competencies. The items were rated on a five-point Likert scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. Data were collected in May, 2017 from the 38 student teachers of session 2017-18 and in May, 2018 from the 39 student teachers of session 2018-19. During the data-collection process, all respondents were informed about the purpose, confidentiality and voluntary nature of the study.

For collecting, qualitative data regarding various aspects of the school internship program, Focussed Group Discussions (FGD's) were conducted with students (10), school mentor teachers (4) of

the academic sessions 2017-18 and 2018-19 respectively to assess the successes experienced, difficulties encountered and significance of the teaching practice experience in personal and socio-professional development of student teachers.

5.0. Results and Findings

The collected data was assessed descriptively by using means. For each statement, the respondent had to respond on a five-point Likert scale ranging from strongly agree (5) to

strongly disagree (1). The findings are presented thematically based on research questions and interpretations were made on the mean rating of the respondents on each statement of the Likert scale i.e. 4.20 – 5.00 (Excellent), 3.40– 4.19 (Good), 2.60 – 3.39 (need improvement), 1.80 – 2.59 (Poor) and 1.00 – 1.79 (Very poor). Items were grouped according to dimensions and an average of all the means of the items per dimension (global mean) was used to make inferences and discuss the findings to the research questions. The results are presented as follows:

Research Question 1: What are the social, professional and personal difficulties perceived by student teachers during the school internship program?

Table 1. Results on the dimension of Professional and Institutional Socialization		
Sr. No.	Item	Mean Score
1.	During the internship, working with experienced teachers was a good experience.	4.81
2.	I am satisfied with the school's resources for teaching activities.	3.91
3.	I was welcomed as a teacher in the school by the school administration.	3.41
4.	I had a good relationship with the school administration.	3.35
5.	I got respect as a teacher from students.	3.78
6.	I got guidance from the mentor teacher.	3.24
7.	I was allowed to use teaching aids and instruments available in the host school.	2.49
8.	It was not difficult to work with the mentor teacher.	3.49
9.	I never missed my teaching internship without informing the mentor teacher.	4.72
	Global Mean Score	3.68

As per the results summarised in Table 1, a global mean score of 3.68 indicated that the interns generally had a good experience in their respective schools regarding professional and institutional socialization i.e. to identify professional and personal difficulties perceived by student teachers during the school internship program. The majority of the sampled student teachers have responded positively on six out of the nine items, as the mean scores for the six items (item no. 1,2,3,5,8 and 9) were greater than 3.40. They expressed that during the internship program those worked with experienced school teachers, got respect as a teacher and mentored by the experienced school teachers. For item no. 4 and 6, the mean scores were 3.35 and 3.24 respectively, it indicated that for procedures of internship need to be improved for maintaining a good relationship with the school administration and to have guidance from the mentor teacher. A low mean score (2.49) on the item no. 7, indicated dissatisfaction among interns for not allowing them to use teaching aids and instruments of the host school.

Research Question 2: What are the perceptions of student teachers' regarding the adequacy of

learning experiences, acquiring of pedagogic competencies and knowledge during the school internship program?

Table 2. Results on the dimmension of Learning and Professional Development		
Sr. No.	Item	Mean Score
10.	Teaching internship helped me to apply the teaching skills which I learned theoretically.	4.13
11.	Teaching internship helped me to acquire problem-solving skills.	3.95
12.	Teaching internship helped me to attain mastery of the subject.	4.02
13.	I learned to use a variety of teaching methods.	3.46
14.	I learned to use a variety of teaching-learning materials.	3.13
15.	I improved on my classroom management skills based on the feedback from my mentors and supervisors.	3.61
16.	I took part in giving tests, marking and recording of results.	1.41
17.	I was able to identify students who had difficulties in learning.	2.12
18.	Teaching internship trained me for facing different challenges.	3.79
	Global Mean Score	3.29

Results as shown in Table 2, indicated that a global mean score of 3.29 summarized the views of the interns to provide them more opportunities for learning and professional development, to develop competencies and acquire diversity and adequacy of learning experiences. The majority of the sampled student teachers have responded positively to five out of the nine items, as the mean scores for the six items (item no. 10, 11, 12, 13, 15 and 18) were greater than 3.40. For item no. 14, a mean score of 3.13, pointed out that student teachers need to be trained to use a variety of teaching-learning materials. A lower mean score on the item no. 16 and 17, showed that interns were not involved in academic evaluation and identification of students with learning difficulties.

Research Question 3: What is the perceived effect of the school internship program on the socio-emotional aspects of student teachers?

Table 3. Results on the dimmension ofSocio-Emotional Aspects		
Sr. No.	Item	Mean Score
19.	Teaching internship affected my self-esteem positively.	4.05
20.	Teaching internship reduced my stress related to teaching.	4.24
21.	Teaching internship improved my physical strength to work for long hours.	4.02
22.	Teaching internship improved my confidence in classroom teaching.	4.54
23.	Teaching internship increased cohesiveness and cooperation among peer team members.	4.34
	Global Mean Score	4.24

As per the results summarised in Table 3, the global mean score of 4.24 showed that the school internship program had a positive impact on the self-esteem, confidence, stress levels and team skills of student teachers. The majority of the student teachers have responded positively to all the five items as the mean scores for the five items were greater than 3.40.

Research Question 4: What are the perceived satisfaction levels of student teachers concerning the support and supervision provided by the school and university supervisors during the school internship program?

Table 4. Results on the dimension of Support and Supervision		
Sr. No.	Item	Mean Score
24.	My mentor teacher gave demonstration lessons to me.	0.961
25.	I discussed the content of the lesson with my mentor teacher before preparation of the lesson plan.	3.71
26.	I always presented a written lesson plan to my mentor teacher before teaching.	3.87
27.	My mentor teacher was present for observation during my teaching.	2.84
28.	My mentor teacher always held a discussion session after every class.	1.89
29.	My mentor teacher insisted on the use of teaching-learning materials.	3.85
30.	My college supervisor came twice a week to supervise my progress.	2.73
31.	My progress was closely followed by the college supervisor.	3.13
32.	College supervisor and my mentor teacher had good coordination.	3.70
	Global Mean Score	2.96

As per the results shown in Table 4, a low global mean score of 2.96 pointed out that adequate support and timely supervision was not provided to the interns. On four items (item no. 25, 26, 29 and 32), student teachers had responded positively as those were satisfied with support from mentor teachers, guidance from mentor teacher regarding lesson delivery and usage of teaching aids. Interns expressed their dissatisfaction regarding demonstrations and feedback by mentor teachers, as on item no. 24 and 28, the mean scores are low. As per the mean scores of item no. 27, 30 and 31, procedures need to be amended for observation of lesson delivery by mentor teachers, availability and supervision by the college supervisor for guidance during the internship.

Research Question 5: What is the perceived effect of the school internship program on the professional identity and vocational competencies of student teachers?

Table 5. Results on the dimension of Professional Identity and Vocational Competencies		
Sr. No.	Item	Mean Score
33.	On completion of the teaching internship, I feel like a trained teacher	4.18
34.	Teaching internship made me believe that I could successfully serve in the teaching profession for my whole life.	3.95
35.	After teaching internship, I have positive perceptions for the teaching profession.	4.21
36.	Teaching internship was an effective learning experience.	4.72
37.	Teaching internship was an important and value -enhancing component of my qualification.	4.75
	Global Mean Score	4.36

Based on the results shown in Table 5, a global mean score of 4.36 indicated that the school internship program led to enhance the levels of professional self-fulfilment and vocational competencies of student teachers within the teaching profession. The majority of the student teachers have responded positively to all the five items as the mean scores for the five items were greater than 3.40.

1.0. Discussion of Results

The analyses and interpretation of data indicated that the school internship program provided opportunities to the interns, so that, they could consolidate links between theory and practice which made them ready to enter the teaching profession.

A global mean score of 3.68 on the dimension of professional and institutional socialization specified that the school internship program made student teachers adapt with the new working environment by providing opportunities to develop good relationships with mentor and host school administration. It further helped the interns to get adapted to institutional rules and routines. But, there is a need to make provisions that interns be allowed to use teaching aids and instruments available in the host institute for teaching purposes. Parveen and Mirza (2012) highlighted that student-teachers and principals viewed internship program as a real opportunity to refine and improve their teaching skills in the actual school setting and it had a positive impact on the performance of student-teachers. Whereas Osei-Owusu, Effah, Sam and Agyemang (2013) argued that teacher trainees should be sent to good schools with a suitable learning environment and the partnership schools have to provide adequate teaching and learning materials to facilitate the delivery of teaching by interns.

The global mean score of 3.29 on the dimension of learning and professional development indicated that teaching internship exercise facilitated student teachers to acquire teaching competencies, use a variety of teaching methods, gain problem-solving skills and

management of classroom activities. But to enrich the experiences of interns as a teacher, those need to be involved in activities like giving tests, marking and recording of results. Liaw (2009) confirmed that when the teaching practice is well supported, involving close cooperation between student teachers, mentor teachers and teacher educators, the student teachers improved their efficacy as teachers.

A global mean score of 4.24 on the dimension of socio-emotional aspects confirmed that school internship program experiences have positively improved self-esteem, self-confidence, physical strength and ability to cope with professional stress of intern teachers. Phyllis et al., (2011) indicated that the experience in an afterschool internship encouraged the teacher candidates to see themselves and to be seen by others, exhibiting positive attitudes, sensitivity to diversity and increasing confidence in facilitating hands-on participation, inquiry, and collaborative work.

The global mean score of 2.96 on the dimension of support and supervision revealed that interns were not satisfied with the support and supervision provided to them by the school and college supervisors during the internship program. The responses of the student teachers highlighted the issue of non-delivery of demonstration lessons and no provision of feedback discussion by a majority of mentor teachers. Gujjar, Naoreen, Saifi and Bajwa (2010) highlighted that hands-on experiences, active supervision of live teaching helped the students in understanding the classroom teaching process in a better manner. For this, college supervisors are expected to work closely with associate teachers, support the student teachers and visit the school sites often.

A global mean score of 4.36 on the dimension of professional identity and vocational competencies indicated that the school experience was fulfilling and meaningful to the majority of the student teachers as internship program led to enhance their levels of professional self-fulfilment. Beginning teachers are confronted with

numerous challenges especially in their first year of teaching. Without ample induction support, the beginning teachers could merely develop their capacity on their own (Tak, 2005).

For qualitative data collection, focussed group discussions were conducted with interns and mentor teachers to get their viewpoint regarding the effectiveness of the school internship program and problems faced by interns and mentor teachers during the internship program. The summaries of the discussions with interns and mentor teachers are made and clubbed under different dimensions of the school internship program. As per the overall view of mentor teachers and interns, the school internship program was very beneficial as student teachers can practice their theoretical learning in the real set up. Most of the interns agreed that the internship program provides them with an opportunity to plan and deliver lessons in a time-bound manner. However, they also reported that those were mostly confined to the use of the lecture method and other similar teacher-centred pedagogy during the internship program.

The student-teachers raised the issue of non-availability of good teaching resources in schools and those were not allowed to use teaching aids and instruments available in the host institute for teaching. Interns also pointed out that those need to be involved in school activities such as the construction of classroom tests, conducting examination and keeping of school records and they should be treated as teachers in the host school. Kumar (2012) highlighted that student teachers need to be sent to only those schools who have good resources. Student teachers were received and treated differently in various schools. The student teachers reported that in some of the schools, they were not well received and introduced at their schools of placement and that influenced their performance during teaching internship. The views expressed by the student teachers in focussed group discussions validated the results of quantitative data.

The majority of the mentor teachers

stressed to develop a set of written guidelines about the internship program to conduct activities in a structured way. Checklist, rating scale and written analysis formats are to be provided to mentor teachers to provide feedback to the interns. Student teachers also endorsed that constructive feedback in a format needs to be provided to them after delivering the lesson in real classroom situation. The mentor teachers should observe the lessons of the interns regularly. The demonstration of model lessons by mentor teachers be made compulsory to guide the students about different formats of classroom management and lesson delivery. Ara and Aziz (2013) specified that the duration of teaching practice in an actual classroom should be increased with complete monitoring and active support of teacher educators to the student teachers in the teacher education program.

Further, mentor teachers highlighted the need to have an orientation about their roles and responsibilities during the internship. For this, those suggested that regular communication is needed between the concerned university departments and the collaborative schools before and during the internship program. University teachers have to visit regularly in collaborative schools to discuss the various issues related to the school internship program. In an effective internship program, the role of a supervisor is that of manager, counsellor, instructor, observer, feedback provider, and evaluator. Teacher educators have to discuss strategies and techniques for classroom management to form synergistic relationships with qualified and passionate mentor teachers and university supervisors and only assign coursework that is critical for the development of the student teachers in their internship (Fletcher, Mountjoy and Bailey, 2011).

The mentor teachers and interns affirmed that the internship program provided them with an opportunity to understand different aspects of the school program and improve their skills and abilities in the teaching profession. As shared by interns, teaching internship also increased cohesiveness, cooperation among

peer team members and confidence of interns related to teaching activities and responsibilities.

School internship programs are needed to be designed to prepare teachers not only for their roles as classroom teachers of students but as professionals studying their teaching practice, participating in site-based decision making and coordinating their work with teachers and other members of the school community. These cannot be accomplished without close coordination across all dimensions of the program, if any component is weak, student teachers may not acquire adequate competencies and this will affect the quality of the whole exercise. In the school internship program, both mentors and university faculty are to be well trained regarding their roles and expected to work closely together to support and assist interns as they progress through the exercise.

7.0. References

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