Asian Social Studies and
Applied Research (ASSAR)
Published by ASAR Council

Volume 2 Issue 4
November, 2021
ISSN (E): 2709-9229

Collaborative School-University Partnership to Bridge the Theory-Practice gap in Teaching Practicum: Role and challenges of the Multiple Stakeholders

FAIZA MASOOD
Fatima Jinnah Women University.
Email: faiza.masood@fjwu.edu.pk

Dr. MALIK GHULAM BEHLOL
Fatima Jinnah Women University.

Abstract

The major focus of the study is to explore the perceptions, practices of university tutors (UT), cooperative teachers (CT), and prospective teachers (PT) to establish the collaborative partnership between Universities and Schools for bridging the theory-practice gap in teaching practicum of preservice B.ED (Hons) 4 Years teacher education program. Exploratory Sequential Mixed Method Design with qualitative and quantitative approaches was used to answer the research questions. There were four case studies in the first phase, and the researcher collected data through semi-structured interviews from eight UT. In the second phase, based on the qualitative data, three questionnaires were developed to gather the views of UT, CT, and PT. Participants were selected through, purposive sampling technique. The findings of the study revealed several gaps in the process of a TEI-School collaborative partnership that includes weak and undocumented collaboration, training of PT is the sole responsibility of TEI. Moreover, pre-service teacher education is missing out on the value of including CP and school management perspectives and lack of professional and financial incentives for CP.

Key Words: *School-University Partnership, Theory-Practice Gap, Teaching Practicum, Teacher Education Institutions.*

Introduction

University-dominated pre-service teacher education programs (PSTEP) have been criticized for preparing teachers that are unable to address the demands, expertise and skills of the twenty-first century; and the needs of the multi-ability students in the classroom too (Cochran-Smith, 2005). Amongst the other factors, poor practicum efficacy and weak School-University collaboration play a significant role in producing teacher education graduates that are unable to apply creative, critical, problem-solving skills to bridge the theory-practice gap. It has been established in several research studies that authentic-close collaboration between Schools and Universities in pre-service teacher education programs is important to bridge the theory-practice gap and teach higher-order thinking skills (Haigh & Ward, 2003; Krieg & Sharp, 2003; Turner & Sharp, 2006). The nature of collaboration is complex, individualistic, competitive and utility-driven for UT, CT and PT. This complexity and contestation in the practicum coincide with the ongoing debate about the most appropriate form and location of that practicum within PSTEP.

Criticisms regarding PSTEP revealed that it is too academic and lacking in preparing PT for the "real world" of the classroom because of a lack of genuine collaboration between Schools and Universities. During

teaching practicum, PT are positioned to establish pedagogical connections in the school setting with the support of CT and school leadership. It has been observed that PT do not receive sufficient guidance and modeling of lessons because of poor collaboration between Universities and Schools in Pakistan (Masood & Behlol, 2018). CT have not been educated and trained to perform their role based on modern pedagogies and teaching strategies. The professional and financial incentives have not been provided to them because of a lack of documented and approved collaboration between Schools and Universities. It has serious repercussions on the quality of PTEP and also bridging the theory-practice gap. The existing situation lacks a balance in theory and practice in pre-service teacher education programs that may enable the graduated to bridge the theory-practice gap (Korthagen, F. A. 2010).

Higher Education Commission of Pakistan has taken the initiative to structure and develop collaborative and effective partnerships between Schools and Universities for improving the quality of Teacher Education Programs (HEC, 2012). The TEI-School collaboration will create enabling environment for UT, CT and PT to foster learning for bridging the theory-practice gap and meet the needs of multi-ability students (Khan, 2012). Collaboration will provide opportunities for PT to observe modelling of the lesson, learn classroom management skills, sharing new ideas (Stephens & Boldt, 2004). However, the required results has not been achieved because of poor collaboration and coordination amongst the stakeholders (Ahmad, S. 2013).

Integrating theory into practice is not a straightforward method; it is a dialectical and dynamic mechanism that has to turn theory into practice (Orland-Barak & Yinon, 2007). The goal of the teaching activity is to jointly create and apply new pedagogical strategies by the UT, CT and PT. It needs dedication, commitment, the spirit of sacrificing and passionate urge amongst the stakeholders (Galloway & Edwards, 2014) that has been observed lacking amongst the stakeholders in Pakistan (Masood & Behlol 2020). Moreover, bridging the theory-practice gap requires the services of the best brains. In Pakistan, joining the teaching profession is not the priority of high achievers. Usually, it is the last choice for the students because of low salary, power and pelf (QURESHI, 2015; Ahmad, 2013; AEPAM, 2017),

In Pakistan, maintaining the quality of PSTE and training of PT is the sole responsibility of Pre-Services Teacher Education Institutions (Kahn & Lewis, 2014). It is missing out on the value of including CT and school management perspectives.

Universities are responsible for providing theoretical knowledge in the form of taught sessions and assignments, while schools serve as a place to observe teaching strategies, modelling, practice teaching for PT (Khan, 2012; Masood & Behlol, 2108). Although UT and CT supervise PT in classrooms, the evidence supports that PT finds a range of barriers during teaching practicum in school settings. These include lack of support from CT, lack of opportunities in modelling and lesson planning sessions, limited opportunities to use low-cost resources and ICT technology in school (Hascher, Cocard, & Moser, 2004); Masood & Behlol, 2018). Teacher education institutes and schools work as two distinct sectors, and by and large do not function collaboratively.

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of the study was to firstly identify factors which appeared to be important to the development of the professional collaborative partnership and secondly to identify specific strategies that prospective teachers employed to bridge theory-practice gap during teaching practicum.

Research Methodology

In this study, the researcher explores the practices and perceptions of university tutors, cooperative teaches, and prospective teachers about collaborative partnership during teaching practicum. This study applied an Exploratory Sequential Mix Method Design, (Creswell, J. W., & Plano Clark, V. L. 2018) using qualitative and quantitative approaches. In a sequential exploratory mixed methods design, the first stage, which is prioritized, is for gathering qualitative data that is used to construct a theory tested using quantitative data (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). There were two phases in the study, the first phase was qualitative, and the second phase was quantitative. There were four case studies in the first phase, and the researcher collected data through semi-structured interviews from eight university tutors. In the second phase, based on the qualitative data, three questionnaires were developed to gather the views of UTs, CTs, and PTs, which were based on three nested cases. All participants were selected through, purposive sampling technique, the purposive sampling technique was useful for selecting only those institutions offering the B. Ed (Hons) elementary program. PTs who have completed their practicum two times and university tutors supervised the selected PTs during teaching practicum, and CT who mentored PT participated in the study. It was appropriate to select those institutions, UTs, PTs, and CTs of the practicing schools willing to participate in the study and be involved in the mentoring process.

Data Analysis

Qualitative data were analysed by thematic analysis. All interviews were recorded with the consent of the UTs. The researcher tried to remain unbiased throughout the interviews but observed the participants' pitch of voice and body language during the interviews. Thematic analysis was carried out using open coding, axial coding, analytical coding, and selective coding. Quantitative data was analysed by using SPSS. Responses to the questionnaire were fed into the SPSS, and the descriptive statistics were applied to analyse the data by using percentages.

Qualitative Data Analysis

There are two main themes, and various sub-themes emerged from the analysis of semi-structured interviews that helped to identify supporting factors of school-university collaborative partnership at teaching practicum. Details of the main and sub-themes, including their frequencies, are presented in the table below:

Table: 1 Themes and sub-themes

Themes	Sub-themes	Frequency	Total
Collaboration	Collaboration	4	8
	Capacity building	5	8
	Manage the Workload	5	8
	Lead the Seminars in schools	2	8
	Cooperation	6	8
The theory-practice gap	Bridging the theory-practice gap	6	8

Collaboration

UT frequently used the term "collaboration" (4/8) to promote PTs professional development at schools. We support one another and share responsibility for the professional growth of PTs. They viewed that

collaboration within the school is not an end in itself but rather a way of establishing environments that will help to enhance teachers' learning and practice. UT, E said:

"Collaborative partnership requires successful teamwork. The partnership is what facilitates and promotes the sharing of information and learning between the partners. When challenges emerge, and solutions are found, the experience is located in various individuals and different positions within the relationship."

There has been a frequent reference to collaboration and teamwork through data sources. In these collaborative contexts, some UTs have acknowledged the symbiotic relationship. Their cohort had a similar standard and partnership meaning. As representatives of the partnership between the school and universities, they reflected on the need for stability, risk-taking, collaboration, and constant reflection on their work. As a UT said:

"In collaboration, we learn a lot of things that influence the way we work in the classroom. We follow the teaching styles, way of dealing students by others in collaborative working".

Capacity building

UTs mentioned capacity building (5/8) as the mechanism in which school-university learn, develop, and maintain the expertise, experience, tools, equipment, and other resources required for a successful partnership. As UT, E said that

"We have to build up the capacities of cooperative teachers so that they work effectively; these skills, capabilities, and attitudes are needed to be built in teacher education programs about the job that has been performed by the CTs for prospective teachers in the schools. It is a continuous, ongoing, and dynamic capacity-building program that may continue without any break".

Without capacity building, it's difficult to build an effective partnership. This absence of a solid base can result in decaying equipment, weak contact between both parties, and a lack of attention to the founding values of teaching practicum. As UT, F said:

"Structures and tradition will get in the way of operating in collaborations. There is a need for dedication and capacity building from all parties over the long term. This can, however, be compromised where policy issues interact in widely inconsistent and unequal ways with the nature, ethos, and finances of relationships and influence them."

Successful capacity building involves continuous evaluation and commitment, resources, and time frames. The overall strengthening of the goal should be a large outcome but more tangible. Particular reorganization objectives may include implementing a partnership strategy, improved contact with all stakeholders, and resolving trends in cultural differences. As UT G said:

"Working in relationships has its costs that include attention. Partnerships face a threat and have transaction costs - the time, energy, trust, respect, responsibility, the communication needed to keep the relationship alive and well. Support is a vital contributor to partners' sustainability, but partnerships still need plans to be built to persist in austere times. School-university partnerships unable to survive without adequate resources".

Manage the Workload

Manage Workload (5/8) is also a frequently mentioned theme from UTs. They viewed that CTs are always busy with different school tasks, and their expanded workload entails balancing multiple tasks. It is difficult for them to pay careful attention to PTs without any incentive and balance their workload. UT, C said that:

"We have to convince the top-level management in the university and school about the approval and provision of incentives to CTs that boost up their motivation level and interest for mentoring the PTs."

Majority UTs (5/8) mentioned that universities have to provide some sort of incentives to schools to manage properly. Without these incentives, the CTs and school heads are not interested in the practicum and sometimes do not cooperate. If the CTs are unwilling and motivated to do the job, how can they achieve practicum objectives?

Lead the Seminars in schools

Two UTs (2/8) recommended seminars, arranged in schools for building the capacities of the CTs and the other relevant stakeholders in collaboration by the experts of the schools and universities. They mutually share the strengths and weaknesses of the teaching practicum and draw a roadmap for future collaboration that supports overcoming the challenges.

Cooperation

The majority of the participants (6/8) reveals that cooperation is mandatory to complete any task. It is a form of social engagement in which all members benefit from achieving their shared objectives. It involves all members working together to accomplish a shared purpose or goal. But most of the participants mentioned that there is a coordination gap between schools and universities. As participant D said:

"The school administration and CTs are not aware of the value of teaching practicum; they do not value it, and consider it as time-killing activity and don't want to receive PTs."

The majority of the UTs (6/8) mentioned that coordination and collaboration are key factors for school-university partnership, CTs' apathetic attitude towards practicum is due to the coordination gap. The school faculty, including CTs and Head teachers, don't value the practicum; they think it is just a wastage of time.

Bridging the theory-practice gap

Universities in Pakistan have retained a more conventional curriculum that underlines theoretical aspects of teaching, often separated from the practical learning in the school area. In the more conventional observational trend of study, PTs are required to get theoretical knowledge at University and apply and practice it in school settings. When participants were asked about their views on "how to bridge the theory-practice gap," the majority (6/8) of the UTs said that they try to provide theoretical knowledge in the form of sessions, assignments, and other activities. At the same time, schools serve as a place for the observation and modeling of teaching strategies. They viewed the application of theoretical knowledge by modeling as the sole responsibility of the schools. As participant H said:

"I think we have to change practicum policy, and when the students are enrolled in teacher education program, teaching practical and theoretical learning goes side by side throughout the pre-service teacher duration. PTs go to school practicum One or Two days in all semesters for the practice of theoretical knowledge. They need to learn through practice marking attendance, maintaining registers, constructing tests, teaching with different methods, dealing with problem students, conducting action research. In this way, the theory-practice gap can be bridged."

UTs viewed (6/8) that most of the time, school staff were reluctant to provide space for PTs to practice the latest techniques in the classroom. School heads and CTs don't trust PTs; hence, they don't welcome PTs to their schools which hinders to bridge theory-practice gap. For instance, participant F said that

"The head teachers and CTs are sometimes reluctant to welcome the prospective teachers, and also they don't allow to teach Board Exam classes like fifth, eighth, and tenth. They think that PTs are not as experienced to produce good results."

Most of the participants viewed that model teaching practices, (6/8) pedagogical support, (7/8) continuous observation, feedback, and reflection during teaching practicum can bridge the theory-practice gap.

Quantitative Data Analysis

Data gathered from UTs, CTs and PTs about *collaboration* for bridging theory-practice gap and development school-university partnership model is analyzed in the form of charts. The School-university partnership model suggests a collaborative relationship between a more experienced practitioner (UTs, CTs) and a student-teacher (prospective teachers). Quantitative analysis is presented as under:

Table 2: Summary of Collaboration during the teaching practicum

Collaboration	UTs	CTs	PTs
Item mean	2.92	3.00	2.51
Item S. D	1.91	1.10	1.19

Table 2 reveals that mean and S.D from UTs were 2.92: 1.91, which shows that most of the UTs were not agreed with the statements. Mean and S.D from CTs were 3.00: 1.10, which reveals that CTs were agreed with the statements, while Mean and S.D from PTs were 2.51: 1.19, which shows that majority of the PTs were not agreed with the statements.

Chart 1, revealed that 80% of UTs agreed that there was not enough time to arrange a Seminar venue in a practicing school to strengthen practicum collaboration. 60% of UTs agreed that they did not often have enough time to respond to any school correspondence about PTs' issues. 60% UTs agreed that often there was enough time to receive the interim review from the school and respond appropriately if any cause for concern was highlighted. 40% said that once or twice they visit the school for non-observed support for concern is identified.

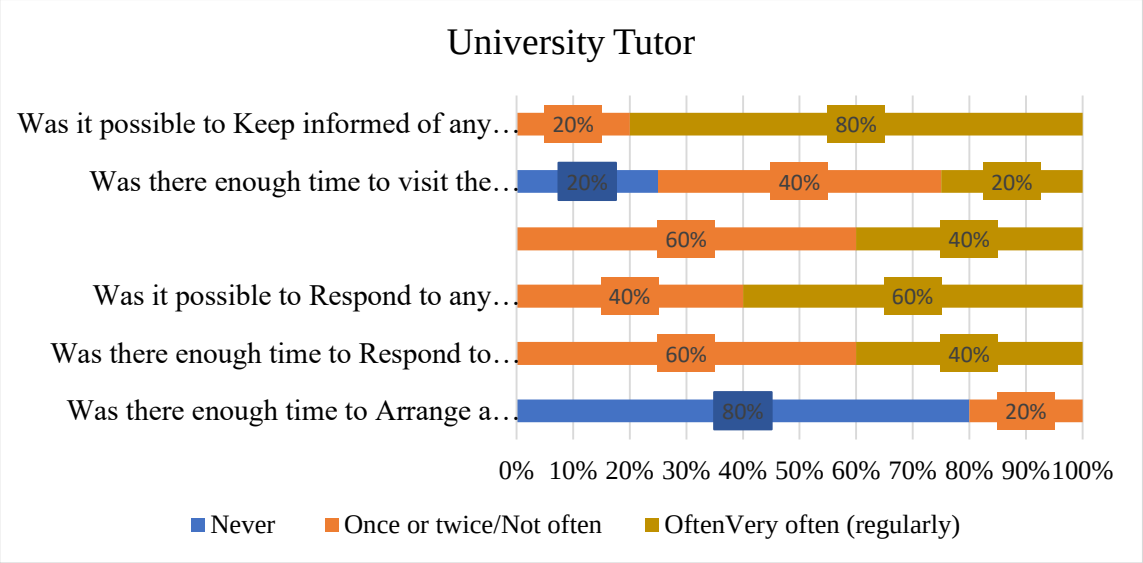

Chart 1: Views of UTs on Collaboration during teaching practicum

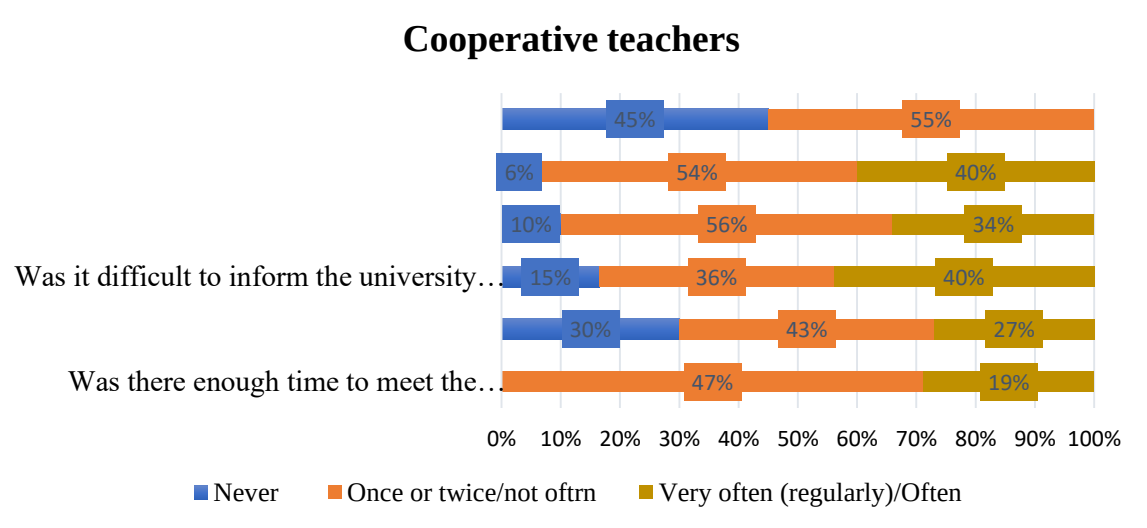

Chart 2: Views of CTs on Collaboration during the teaching practicum

Chart 2 revealed that most of the participants (47%) mentioned that there was not enough time to meet the PTs on their arrival in the school because of a busy schedule. They also viewed (43%) that once or twice it was possible to introduce PTs to the school attendance system and other staff members. 40% of CTs mentioned that 'very often' it was difficult to inform the university Tutor about joint assessment visits and lesson observation. The majority of the CTs (56%) said that it was not possible to inform the UTs about the practicum problems because of busy schedule. 55% of CTs mentioned that often it was possible to Complete the Cause for Concern Report is required to be mailed to the university tutor.

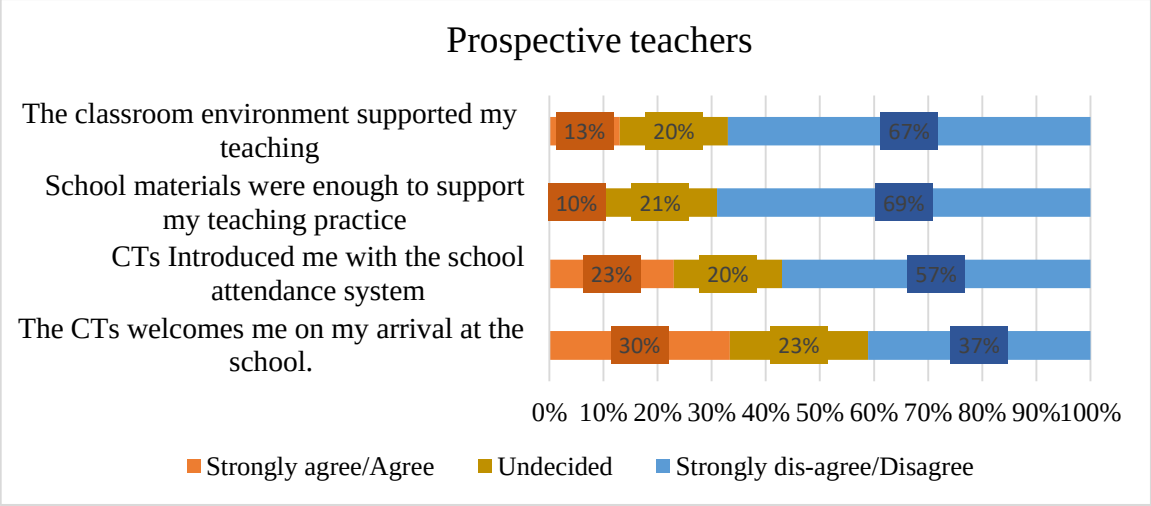

Chart 3: Views of PTs on Collaboration during the teaching practicum

Chart 3 revealed that the majority of the PTs disagreed or strongly disagreed (37%) with the statement that "CTs welcome them on their arrival at school for teaching practicum." A large number of PTs (57%) disagreed or strongly disagreed that CTs introduce them to the school attendance system and other staff members. While (69%) disagreed or strongly disagreed that School materials were enough to support their teaching practice, and (67%) disagreed or strongly disagreed that the classroom environment supported their teaching.

Discussion

The majority of the participants revealed that school-university collaboration is a significant factor in expanding PTs' options for career growth. The departments of education in universities have a long tradition of collaborating with schools on teaching practice and professional development that is a strong hallmark of collaboration activities.

The majority of the participants were concerned about the lack of collaboration between the school and the university in favour of teaching practicum. The fundamental role of school during teaching practicum is almost entirely dependent on collaboration and effective communication. Most of the UTs revealed that schools and universities carry out separate plans and projects with no or unstructured collaboration in Pakistan at teaching practicum. Both have uncoordinated connections with each other, with a wide communication gap.

Data revealed that UTs did not have enough time to answer different questions about aspects of the partnership placement. Most of the participants (UTs) admitted that they were unable to contact regularly and respond to any correspondence from schools about PTs' issues throughout the teaching practicum. The role of CTs during teaching practicum was non-existent, as they were not willing to discuss their professional development plan with UTs and PTs. Data reflected that it was difficult for CTs to manage the workload to complete the Interim Review at the end of every week and respond to any correspondence from PTs.

These findings are supported by studies conducted by Ulvik and Smith, (2011) and Krull, (2005), that a successful teacher in the classroom does not always perform the responsibilities of a successful UT or CT

as a mentor. Tutorship is a Complex social relationship between the mentors and mentees. Mentoring skills need to be gained from technical experience and expertise. UTs, and CTs have to discuss their personal and professional plans for capacity building and manage workload to facilitate PTs during teaching practicum. In this regard, UTs mentioned that CTs need training for performing their role.

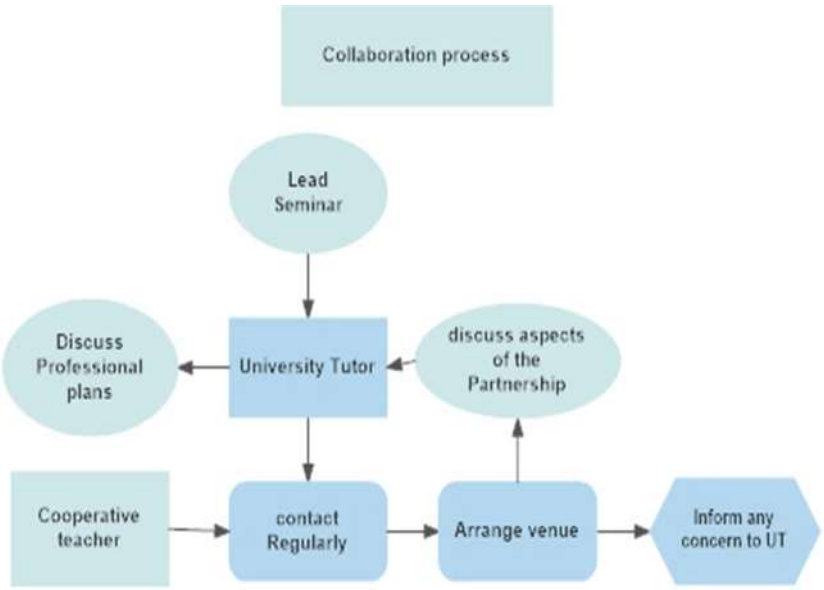

Figure No1: Collaboration Process

Koç, supported the findings that CTs has a significant need to be trained about their mentoring positions to offer assistance to PTs. Mutlu (2014) also performed a qualitative survey of CTs, and the findings were compatible with the study, which showed that CTs were cooperating; however, they need appropriate training for mentoring PTs. PTs learn from UTs and CTs by spending quality time in the classroom, observing CTs in the classroom, asking questions, seeking help, and eventually accepting increasing personal obligations to grow.

These findings are also compatible with a study conducted by Hillman and colleagues; they concluded that teaching practicum offers PTs opportunities to apply what they have learned during coursework in the classroom setting. This form of teaching provides space for the university faculty to communicate with school teachers and revise the course outlines in the light of field experience (Hillman, Bottomley, Raisner, & Malin, 2000).

In the quantitative phase, the mean average of collaboration from UTs and PTs is less than three, while from CTs is equal to three, which shows that both institutions were incapable of developing collaborative links during teaching practicum. The findings of Coşkun's study also align with the findings of the current research that CTs were found under pressure, and it was difficult for them to cooperate and develop functional contact with UTs and PTs (Coşkun, 2013). The study conducted by Mattsson, Eilertsen, and Rorrison, concluded that pre-service teacher education relies on schools to implement theoretical knowledge through partnership. Partners focused on the growth of collaborative relationships amongst all

actors. The system addresses the critique of more realistic teacher education and allows closer cooperation with teacher education institutions. School-university partnership represents a turning point globally for practice, seeing classrooms as places of work where teacher education is prominent (Mattsson, Eilertsen, & Rorrison, 2012)

Collaboration is a critical component of practicum; it enables all partners to collaborate in the professional development of PTs. Relationships are required to be built not only with a single school but with other schools as well. UT incorporates contextualized site-based knowledge back to the university coursework.

CT and UT may strengthen mutual learning through collaborative academic activities such as seminars, workshops, and informal discussions amongst schools and universities to enhance mutual academic bondages. They need to be based on emerging day-to-day problems of classroom teaching. All the stakeholders (UTs, CTs, PTs, School heads) may share their learning strategies to move forward to groom a quality teacher. Cooperative teachers may learn how-to guides the day-to-day work of the PT by providing contact details, venues, providing feedback, and initiating the PT into the life of the profession.

Collaboration is a multidimensional concept, and only inside the school is not an end itself but rather a means to create conditions conducive for continued improvement and change in teachers learning and practices. Mainly, it aims to achieve two broader goals of teachers 'professional development and building institutional cooperation. Teachers in Pakistan needed to be sensitized about the virtue of collaboration and a spirit of collaboration and partnerships to build a collective vision towards improvement in teaching and learning processes. Feiman-Nemser, (2012) argue that the development of an appropriate mode of collaboration remains a challenge for successful school-university partnerships. She suggested that, both parties must have the vision to move beyond the existing research focus to explore ways to build school-university collaborations.

Conclusion

Concerning the findings of the study, it can be concluded that there is little collaboration between school-university during teaching practicum for bridging the theory-practice gap in teaching practicum at pre-service teacher education programs in Pakistan. The professional development of PTs is the sole responsibility of the universities. Pre-service teacher education is missing out on the value of including CTs and school management perspectives.

Based on the findings, the researcher would infer that most PTs did not have effective interaction and connection with CTs and other school personnel during teaching practicum. Consequently, they could not get proper guidance for solving their academic problems. They may not be adequately trained by the university or have not found an acceptable environment and school cooperation to learn how to teach. However, by creating strong relationships with all parties, it can be less stressful.

References

Allen, J. M. (2011). Stakeholders' perspectives of the nature and role of assessment during practicum. *Teaching and teacher education*, *27*(4), 742-750.

Ahmad, S. (2013). Teacher education in Ethiopia: Growth and development. *African Journal of Teacher Education*, *3*(3).

Carlgren, I. (2012). The learning study as an approach for "clinical" subject matter didactic research. *International Journal for Lesson and Learning Studies*.

Cherian, F. (2007). Learning to teach: Teacher candidates reflect on the relational, conceptual, and contextual influences of responsive mentorship. *Canadian Journal of Education/Revue canadienne de l'éducation*, 25-46.

Cochran-Smith, M. (2010). Toward a theory of teacher education for social justice. In *Second international handbook of educational change* (pp. 445-467). Springer, Dordrecht.

Colburn, A. (2003). *The Lingo of Learning: 88 Education Terms Every Science Teacher Should Know*. NSTA Press, 1840 Wilson Blvd., Arlington, VA 22201-3000. Web site: www. nsta. org.

Creswell, J. W., & Plano Clark, V. L. (2018). Designing and conducting mixed methods research. Third.

Galloway, D., & Edwards, A. (2014). *Primary school teaching and educational psychology*. Routledge.

Hascher*, T., Cocard, Y., & Moser, P. (2004). Forget about theory—practice is all? Student teachers' learning in practicum. *Teachers and teaching*, *10*(6), 623-637.

Hillman, S. L., Bottomley, D. M., Raisner, J. C., & Malin, B. (2000). Learning to practice what we teach: Integrating elementary education methods courses. *Action in Teacher Education*, *22*(sup2), 91-100.

Khan, S. H. (2012). Integration of ICT component in teacher educational institutions: An unavoidable step towards transforming the quality of present teacher education system.

Koç, E. M. (2012). Idiographic roles of cooperating teachers as mentors in pre-service distance teacher education. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, *28*(6), 818-826.

Korthagen, F. A. (2010). How teacher education can make a difference. *Journal of education for teaching*, *36*(4), 407-423.

Krull, E. (2005). Theory and practice in today's teacher education. *Trames*, *9*(2), 123-128.

Masood, F., & Behlol, M. G. Learning and Practicing of Innovative Pedagogical Skills of Prospective Teachers' In Teaching Practicum At B. ED (Hons) Elementary Program.

Orland-Barak, L., & Yinon, H. (2007). When theory meets practice: What student teachers learn from guided reflection on their own classroom discourse. *Teaching and teacher education*, *23*(6), 957-969.

Petrosko, J. M., & Munoz, M. A. (2002). A Collaborative Evaluation Model for Systematic Renewal of Teacher Education: Assessing the Effect of Professional Development Schools on Teachers and Students.

Sharp, S., & Krieg, S. (2003). Rethinking relationships in teacher education partnerships: The Compact Experience.

Stephens, D., & Boldt, G. (2004). School/university partnerships: Rhetoric, reality, and intimacy. *Phi Delta Kappan*, *85*(9), 703-707.

Turner, W., & Sharp, S. (2006). Evaluating the effective relationships and participation in teacher education partnerships. In *Proceedings of the 2006 Australian Teacher Education Association conference* (pp. 286-288). Fremantle, WA: Australian Teacher Education Association.

Ulvik, M., & Smith, K. (2011). What characterises a good practicum in teacher education?. *Education Inquiry*, *2*(3), 517-536.

Qureshi, R. (2015). They are able who think they are able: Relationship between Self Efficacy and In-Service Teacher Education. *International Journal on New Trends in Education & their Implications (IJONTE)*, *6*(2).

Ward, G., & Haigh, M. (2017). Challenges and changes: developing teachers' and initial teacher education students' understandings of the nature of science. *Research in Science Education*, *47*(6), 1233-1254.