

Assessment Practices of Practicum Supervisors

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Abstract

Assessment, undoubtedly, plays a significant role, not only in helping students learn but also in improving instruction. Using assessment practices mentioned in the National Professional Standards for Teachers in Pakistan (2009) as an analytical framework, this qualitative study documented the assessment practices of practicum supervisors from three major teacher preparation programs (TPPs) in Rawalpindi and Islamabad. Faculty members who had served practicum twice and student teachers from the VIII semester were the participants. The main data sources - interviews and focused group discussion, were transcribed verbatim and coded using provisional themes. The analysis revealed that practicum supervisors from the three TPPs were not following NPSTP as a guide to assess student teachers' (STs) teaching. This study underscores the role of practicum supervisors in improving learning experiences for STs during practicum and identifies the current assessment practices to suggest focusing on all the aspects i.e., lesson planning, management, assessment, and teaching, and should use the NPSTP's assessment rubric for STs assessment to make practicum more beneficial and productive.

Keywords: Practicum supervisors; assessment practices; student teachers; National Professional Standards for Teachers in Pakistan

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Introduction

Assessments can be powerful tools to support students' learning, rather than using assessment data for "rank[ing]" schools and students (Guskey, 2003). Assessment, undoubtedly, plays a significant role, not only in helping students learn but also in improving instruction. In Pakistan, the National Education Policy Framework (Ministry of Federal Education & Professional Training [NEPF], 2018) identified assessments as one of the many aspects to be revisited and improved if we aspire to provide quality education to all children. The NEPF also maintains that the existing education system lacks "competency-based training" (considering the preparation of prospective teachers to be competent in using varied assessments) – thus lacks quality education. The National Professional Standards for Teachers in Pakistan (NPSTP, 2009) document very clearly states for Standard-5: Assessment that "Teachers assess students' learning using multiple assessment strategies and interpret results to evaluate and promote students' achievement and to modify instruction to foster the continuous development of students" (p.13).

To prepare student teachers (STs) to assess effectively and to use assessment data effectively, four national documents, (i) The National Education Policy (ii) The National Curriculum, (iii) NPSTP, and (iv) B.Ed Elementary Curriculum, provide pivotal guidelines. The national education policy, the NPSTP, and the national curriculum provide the base for the curriculum of B.Ed. or teacher preparation. The NPSTP, the NEPF, and the Single National Curriculum (National Curriculum Council, 2020) encourage using a wide range of assessments to support students in learning. The analysis of the B. Ed curriculum (2012), composed of national and international experts from teacher education, provides theoretical underpinnings of various types of assessment and ample opportunities for STs to implement their theoretical learning of classroom assessment in the actual classroom during four practica spread over four years of the degree program.

In Pakistan, existing professional literature (e.g., Huma & Akhtar, 2021; Fatima & Behlol, 2018; Shah, Ahmad, Bibi, Akhtar, Raza, Rauf, Ali, Reba, Khan & Khattak, 2021) on practicum mostly focuses on the views of teacher mentors and STs about practicum, problems, and challenges faced by teacher mentors and STs, learning opportunities for STs, etc. In the Pakistani context, little is known about the assessment practices of practicum supervisors and their use of STs' assessment data. In another study, we examined whether three teacher education institutions, offering B. Ed Elementary Program in Rawalpindi and

Islamabad were implementing the practicum model as prescribed in the Practicum Guide III (USAID, 2012) and offering some research-based practices that can appraise the existing practices – making practicum a significant learning experience for STs (Iqbal, Naseem, & Azam, 2020). The study shows that one of the three institutions (Institution C [I-C]) outperformed the other two in following the Practicum model in letter and spirit. A closer look at the analysis showed that STs were not observed as the Practicum Model suggested and the NPSTP was completely overlooked by all three TPPs, even though the Practicum Guide III (2012) provides a rubric for using the NPSTP to assess STs' teaching performance. Therefore, if practicum supervisors were not observing STs as suggested and were not using the NPSTP as an assessment tool, then what are they using for assessing STs' teaching and learning during practicum? Using "Knowledge and Understanding and Performance and Skills" (NPSTP, 2009, pp. 13-14) as an analytical framework, this paper focuses on the following central research question.

What are the assessment practices of practicum supervisors to assess STs in three teacher preparation programs (TPPs) in Rawalpindi and Islamabad? To answer this central question, we further ask, (i) What is the purpose of assessing STs during practicum according to the practicum supervisors? (ii) What assessment tools do practicum supervisors use to assess STs? (iii) What is the focus of practicum supervisors' assessment? We then discuss the findings in light of NPSTP.

The *Knowledge and Understanding* component mentioned in NPSTP (2009) is considered theoretical, and the *Performance and Skills* is the practical component practiced during practicum. The major purpose of this paper is to document practicum supervisors' existing assessment practices and find out whether their practices are aligned with NPSTPs. Performance and skills (see Table 2) are closely related to international assessment standards (Kitchen, Bethell, Fordham, Henderson, & Li, 2019). In addition, these components suggest three substantial learning opportunities for STs. First, opportunities to gain knowledge and understanding of different assessment types and their uses. These opportunities are provided during their coursework. Second, teacher educators and practicum supervisors must be experts in using and modeling several assessment types to assess STs' learning in courses and practicum. We maintain that STs should be given the experience of using assessment (in the form of feedback) for their own learning (Muirhead, 2018). Third, opportunities encourage STs to apply assessment types in real classrooms and discuss issues they face during practicum with their practicum supervisors.

Literature Review

Since TPPs are significant for producing high-quality teachers who subsequently ensure effective teaching (Manzar-Abbas & Lu, 2013; Huma & Akhtar, 2021), these programs have been an issue of national concern in recent years. Over the last few years, a huge focus has shifted toward the TPPs aimed at improving student learning outcomes. It is established that teaching is becoming more and more challenging with the rapid changes and advancements in society in terms of economy, knowledge, technology, etc. Therefore, it is imperative to re-examine the methods and techniques used in TPPs to produce quality teachers.

Practicum is the most important component of teacher preparation programs (TPPs) around the globe. However, STs' learning outcomes have been a neglected aspect of teacher preparation in Pakistan (e.g., Huma & Akhtar, 2021; Iqbal, Naseem, & Azam, 2020). Different terms such as field experiences, practice teaching, and internship have been used in the literature for practicum (Sulistiyo, Mukminin, Abdurrahman, & Haryanto, 2017). Whichever term researchers use to describe practicum, they all agree that the time STs spend in the actual classroom offers them opportunities to apply their learning and explore their teaching styles and try out assessments (Chimhenga, 2017; Guskey, 2003; Kitchen, Bethell, Fordham, Henderson, & Li, 2019). Practicum, a part of TPPs, offers a strong basis for future teachers providing an opportunity to practice the art of teaching in real school settings.

The two individuals who play a significant role in preparing STs and converting practicum into a successful learning experience for STs are practicum supervisors and teacher mentors (CTs) (Huma & Akhtar, 2021). Practicum supervisors are faculty members serving in TPPs, and teacher mentors are usually experienced teachers serving in schools. Practicum supervisors, who are also teachers of STs, influence the quality of learning experiences and opportunities of STs – such as observing STs' teaching and giving them feedback (Chimhenga, 2017), facilitating STs to reflect on their teaching (Foong, 2018) and helping them navigate their learning about aspects such as planning, teaching methods, management strategies, and assessment.

According to the Practicum Guide III (the Guide), a practicum supervisor, besides being a liaison between cooperating schools and the TPP, must provide feedback on at least two lesson plans through classroom observations, conferences, and the weekly seminar. Practicum supervisors must also “guide entry into the profession through discussion with the Student Teacher of professional practice issues, providing a

guided seminar experience, conferring with the Student Teacher before and after classroom observations, and giving feedback on teaching to the Student Teacher (p. 19).” In the Pakistani Context, different aspects of practicum have been studied – assessment practices of teacher educators (Huma & Akhtar, 2021); overall evaluation of practicum (Gujjar, Rizwan, & Bajwa, 2011), views of STs and challenges faced during practicum (Bashir, Malik, Fatima & Bashir, 2014). Other researchers (such as Murtaza, Iqbal, & Khaleeq, 2016) studied portfolios, reflective writing, and lack of constructive feedback from CTs as different ways to assess STs’ performance during practicum. CTs are mainly responsible for guiding and mentoring STs, overlooking the role of practicum supervisors during practicum. We argue that in-service teachers who lack knowledge about instructional planning and strategies (Rizwan & Masrur, 2018), may not possess updated knowledge about assessment practices. Therefore, in such a scenario, the role of practicum supervisors becomes even more significant.

Contrary to the aspects focused on in the existing literature in the Pakistani context, this study particularly focused on what assessment practices practicum supervisors used and whether those practices are aligned with the proposed NPSTPs. Therefore, it is vitally important to study, document, and reflect on what we, as teacher educators/practicum supervisors, do in the contemplation of finding areas of improvement within TPPs.

Research Methodology

Research Design. This paper is a part of a larger concurrent mixed-method study in which researchers adopted a sequential explanatory design (for quantitative results, please see Iqbal, Naseem, & Azam, 2020). This paper presents findings from the qualitative phase of the study.

Selection of participants. Practicum supervisors and STs of three public institutions offering

B. Ed Elementary Program in Rawalpindi and Islamabad participated in the study. I-C permitted Author 2 to interact with STs and practicum supervisors from the female campus only. A request for interviewing practicum supervisors who satisfied the criterion of supervising practicum twice was disseminated via concerned departments. Only four practicum supervisors out of six responded and agreed to participate (see Table 1). The setting criterion for supervision two times was crucial. First-timers are usually learning their own way around, while second-timers being experienced and proficient, can provide useful insights about the

implementation process and their practices. The details of the participants are as under.

Table 1
Participants' information

Institution (all public)	University Supervisors	Highest degree (at the time of study)	STs (Focus group discussion)
I- A (single gender University)	Participant C	MPhil	10
I- B (single gender College)	Participant A & B	MPhil	10
I- C (University – male/female campuses)	Participant D	MPhil	08

Data collection. This study is grounded in four in-depth semi-structured interviews conducted individually by the second author with practicum supervisors in 2017. To maintain anonymity, the participants were renamed in order of their acceptance to participate. During interviews, the practicum supervisors were asked about their practices with reference to lesson planning, assessment, and feedback while conducting teaching practicum. One-to-one interviews lasted for 30-50 minutes. The participants had very little to share. Three focus group discussions (FGDs) with STs were conducted for triangulation. Eight to ten STs from each of the three institutions participated in FGDs. Participation of STs was voluntary. Each of the FGDs lasted from 20 to 25 minutes. The focus of FGDs was on tasks assigned to STs during practicum and practices of their practicum supervisors related to lesson planning, assessment, and feedback that STs received. Both interviews and FGDs were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim.

Data analysis. Authors 1 and 2 coded individually and then discussed to reach a consensus. Analysis of interviews and FGDs was done in two phases (Saldana, 2016). During the first phase, interviews and FGDs transcripts were read and re-read several times to understand the gist of practicum supervisors' views and STs' views about assessment. In the second phase, interview transcripts were coded manually in two cycles using three provisional sub-themes based on the sub-questions – purpose of assessment, tools used for assessment, and focus of assessment to

document practicum supervisors' assessment practices. In the first cycle, initial coding was used to break down data for examining and comparing similarities and differences among participants. Codes were narrative and descriptive in nature. For example, one of the provisional sub-theme was the purpose of assessment. In the first cycle, one of the codes used was '*ST changes plan according to the class needs.*' In the second cycle, using focused coding, frequently used codes were categorized based on the provisional sub-themes, all such codes were coded as *documenting STs' improvement in planning and delivering lessons*. Once all four interviews were coded, the FGDs were analyzed using the same coding scheme to corroborate the findings. We used the quotes from the practicum supervisors that described the findings.

Ethical considerations. The participants were informed that data would be used only for research purposes and that they could quit at any stage. All participants were given a signed copy of their consent forms. Names of institutions and individuals have been changed for confidentiality purposes.

Results and Discussion

Data analysis revealed that practicum supervisors viewed practicum as "beneficial" because it provides STs with opportunities to apply their learning from teacher preparation coursework and to have first-hand teaching experiences in real classroom settings. These findings are supported by the existing national and international research (Andreasen, Bjorndal, & Kovac, 2019; Bashir, Malik, Fatima, & Bashir, 2014; Murtaza, Iqbal, & Khaleeq, 2016). Only I-C had a "proper practicum supervision team" consisting of the program director, a senior professor, and a practicum supervisor, as opposed to the other two TPPs, where practicum supervisors were solely responsible.

The major findings are discussed under the three provisional sub-themes. Table 2 briefs practicum supervisors' assessment practices compared to *Performance and Skills* (NPSTP, 2009).

Table 2
Practicum supervisors' assessment practices in comparison with assessment Performance & Skills identified by NPSTP (2009)
Performance & Skills (NPSTP, 2009)

	Assessment Practices			Institutions		
	I-A	I-B	I-C	Participant A	Participant B	Participant D
1. Develop and use teacher made tests for continuous internal evaluation of student performance and skills.	Performa for observations by practicum supervisor, & cooperative teacher	Performa for observations by practicum supervisor, & peers	Performa for observations by practicum supervisor, & cooperative teacher	Performa for observations by practicum supervisor, & peers	Performa for observations by practicum supervisor, & cooperative teacher, principal, & peers	Performa for observations by practicum supervisor, cooperative teacher, and principal
2. Analyze student performance using multiple data sources and to modify future plans and instructional techniques that promote desired students learning outcomes.	Portfolio (lesson plans)	Presentations Individual feedback – oral & written	Portfolio (lesson plans)	Presentations	Presentations	Portfolio (lesson plans)
3. Provide students with constructive feedback on their learning and encourage them to use data and self-assessment strategies to monitor their progress toward achieving personal goals.	Team teaching Seminar Feedback		Team teaching Seminar Feedback		Team teaching Feedback – oral & written	On-campus daily reflection Feedback
4. Accurately document and report assessment data and ongoing student achievement to parents and professional staff.	Teaching skills, Communication skills, Interaction with staff & parents, Professionalism		Teaching skills, Communication skills, Interaction with staff & parents, Professionalism	Classroom management, sitting arrangement, personal affects (facial expressions & body movement), voice (pitch, volume)	Classroom management, confidence	Reflection, communication skills, writing skills, intercommunication skills, pedagogy, professional ethics & code of conduct
5. Enhance their knowledge of learners and evaluate students' progress and performance using a variety of formal and informal; assessment techniques to modify teaching and learning strategies.				Lesson continuation after introductions, student involvement in activities, student assessment, all the aspects in the performa		
6. Help students engage in objective self-assessment.	Teaching skills, handling students, communication		Teaching skills, handling students, communication		STs' behavior, blackboard writing, classroom management, confidence	STs' behavior, classroom management, interaction with students, teaching methodology
7. Develop and use objective assessment tools to measure student progress.						
8. Promote opportunities for students to engage in self-assessment activities.						

Purpose of assessment during practicum. Data analysis revealed that all four practicum supervisors inherently believed that the purpose of assessment during practicum is to assess whether STs were able to apply their learning in real classroom settings along with lesson planning and implementation, managing students, and assessing their learning. Except for Participant A, none of the other practicum supervisors explicitly elaborated on the purpose of the assessment. She said, “When they go to school, our focus is on whether students can teach and change their lesson plans according to the situation and the environment in which they are teaching.” Participant D shared, “a sort of internship... students are assigned different tasks and activities related to their content courses, and they can apply their pedagogical knowledge in true situations.” STs from all three TPPs shared similar views about the purpose of assessment as their practicum supervisors.

Tools used for assessment. Practicum supervisors used varied tools to assess STs’ teaching and learning (see Table 2). However, the analysis of their responses revealed that the tools mentioned were not used to provide an in-depth assessment and feedback to STs. We conjecture that with the limited use, STs received surface-level assessments that did not help in meeting the performance and skills criteria set by the NPSTP (Wisniewski, Zierer & Hattie, 2020). When inquired about the tools used to assess STs’ teaching and learning, practicum supervisors said they used an “evaluation performa” to observe STs. A performa refers to a form with statements regarding three main aspects of teaching – lesson delivery, classroom management, and professionalism. Practicum supervisors and CTs check aspects that they observe (such as the ST checks the background knowledge of students). Besides practicum supervisors, STs were observed by CTs, principals, and peers. This finding is consistent with the research done by Merc (2015). When asked what is included in their performas, practicum supervisors said the “skills mentioned in the Practicum Guide.” While talking about assessment methods, participant D shared.

There are different ways for long term and short term but basically we use their portfolios plus there are observations for which we visit the classroom randomly without informing them. We observe their lessons by ourselves plus their cooperating teachers and principals also evaluate them so there are four people who evaluate their performance. There is also a structured performa on the basis of which we evaluate their performance.

The number of lessons observed by practicum supervisors in the three TPPs were from 1-3. The suggested number of lesson observations by the Practicum Guide is two. Participant B shared, “We take short visits to the

classes twice a day... this time we have planned... [to] observe at least two complete lessons for assessing students' performance, one ... in the beginning... and the other will be observed later.”

Participants A and B being from the same TPP, were using different tools. For instance, Participant B did not involve STs to assess their peers and Participant A used team teaching. Team teaching is an approach of co-teaching (Friend & Cook, 2017) and is considered a powerful learning experience for both STs and students in the classroom (Mathea & Marlies, 2016). Participant B stated, “We also ask students for team teaching if one of them is performing well and the other is not so. Each of them is being assessed individually based on one's own performance...” Like many other terms in education, *team teaching* is also misinterpreted. The approach to team teaching used by Participant C does not fall under the approach of co-teaching. She shared, “We assess team teaching in a sense that if one of the students is teaching in one period, so in the next period, the other student will teach, and they are assessed on the base of individual performance.” In addition, team teaching cannot be assessed with performas in practice. There are specific tools to assess team teaching, such as teacher team self-assessments or “self-reflection tools” (Lorio-Barsetn & Stowe, 2018), that are not used by the practicum supervisor.

One of the major roles of practicum supervisors is to give critical and constructive feedback to STs to improve their lessons and teaching skills, including lesson planning, management, and assessment (Vertemara & Flushman, 2017). Peer feedback is usually not comprehensive to help STs improve their teaching skills (Astrid, et al., 2019). Therefore, the practicum supervisors are responsible for providing “effective” feedback (Muirhead, 2018; Vertemara & Flushman, 2017). Participant A shared her practice and said, “...Written feedback is given with the help of performas, we also take their presentations relating to teaching practicum in which they have to prepare a lesson and teach it, and during the presentations, we give our feedback orally.” Participant B underscored the time available for practicum supervisors to give written feedback and shared, “We give oral feedback because by the time we will prepare written feedback, the students will have repeated their mistakes again.” This quote highlights an important issue of lack of time to give feedback. Vertemara and Flushman (2017) also identified lack of “enough time” to spend observing STs in the classroom as one of issues practicum supervisors face. We also conjecture that practicum supervisors may not be well-prepared to give feedback that could support the development of assessment skills expected in NPSTP (Vertemara & Flushman, 2017). Furthermore, both participants (A & B) did not elaborate much about the focus of feedback during presentations.

Likewise, when probed, Participant C did not provide any clear response to the feedback she gave on STs' performas, portfolios, in class, and seminars. Writing daily reflections was another tool used by the practicum supervisors. Daily reflections are powerful and can move the notion of reflective practice from the realm of abstraction to that of the tangible (Cherian, 2007, p. 40). However, how reflections were used to assess STs' performance was not detailed in the participants' responses.

Aspects assessed during practicum. When asked about the aspects they assessed during practicum, all four supervisors mentioned unanimously said, "criteria mentioned in the performa." When probed, Participant A mentioned, "It includes the aspects from the movement to the starting of the lesson, its development, recapitulating. We have assigned separate marks to each section. It also includes students' personality, their vocal delivery, and their movement." However, none of these aspects are mentioned in the Practicum Guide.

Data analysis (see Table 2) showed that all practicum supervisors neither focused on nor provided feedback that supported Performance and Skills mentioned in the NPSTP (2009). Their written and oral feedback focused on a) technical aspects such as voice, blackboard writing, etc., and b) only "weak points" and was "directive" in nature, thus highlighting specific aspects (Muirhead, 2018). Participant C said, "students' assessment is based on their teaching skills, their way of handling students, communication in class etc." By handling students, she meant general classroom management. One of the STs from I-C shared, "In the practicum, we have learned the skill of management." Another ST from I-A mentioned, "The skills that we have developed in our practicum include classroom management and time management". Authors (2020) reported that the use of NPSTP as a criterion to assess STs' performance was largely missing from all three TPPs, which is one of the most significant features of the four-year B. Ed Elementary Program. The "performa" used was provided by their departments – hence no one asked questions regarding the usefulness of the performa in assessing STs' performance. Table 2 shows the similarities and differences between what practicum supervisors thought about skills to be learned and STs' skills they assessed during practicum.

The focus of the assessment of all practicum supervisors was mainly on "management" and delivery of lessons to some extent. None of the practicum supervisors mentioned how STs assessed students in their classrooms and what kind of assessments they used. While discussing the focus of her assessment, Participant A mentioned, "We inform student-teachers that we will be observing their way of delivering the

lesson...involvement of students in the class and activities that student-teachers have designed” and how STs end their lesson. Our analysis of focus of assessment echoed the findings of the research done by Vertemara and Flushman (2017), who found that “the prioritized skills that received a majority of growth feedback included managing student behaviors and engaging student learning (p.48).” As stated earlier, STs also responded very similar to their practicum supervisors and shared more about general aspects of management and nothing about their lesson plans, or their use of learning about assessment types, or clarity about the feedback they received from practicum supervisors.

Conclusions

Based on the findings, we conclude that though practicum supervisors were using different assessment tools to assess STs’ performance during practicum, however, the depth required to use those assessment tools in ways to help STs learn and develop as teachers was missing with reference to the *Performance and Skills* identified in NPSTP. The assessment practices of practicum supervisors from three contextually different TPPs were very similar. The feedback provided by them was mainly oral. The performas used by all three TPPs was not aligned with NPSTP. The feedback was focused on managerial and general components of teaching, such as STs’ voice, management, their overall behavior/attitude, blackboard writing etc. We also conclude that practicum supervisors’ assessment practices with respect to *Performance and Skills* (NPSTP, 2009) is that they were using themselves skills number 2, 3, and 7 to some extent, but were not assessing STs’ performance on the scale.

There are implications for teacher education programs. TPPs must consult the NPSTP document to revisit their performas and set their expectations for STs’ teaching and learning accordingly. The expectations must be shared with all stakeholders including STs, CTs, school principals, and practicum supervisors. Furthermore, being a part of a renowned TPP, we know that neither faculty nor CTs receives any kind of PD on giving feedback or any aspect of teaching practicum. TPPs may organize workshops, especially for their faculty, cooperative teachers, and STs focusing on how to give three C’s feedback - constructive, critical, and comprehensive covering all aspects of three teaching skills, which are lesson planning, management, and assessment given in the Practicum Guide.

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