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Prospective Teachers' Learning and Practicing Assessment in Teaching Practicum: Comparative Perspective in Pre-Service Teacher Education Programmes

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Prospective Teachers' Learning and Practicing Assessment in Teaching Practicum: Comparative Perspective in Pre-Service Teacher Education Programmes

Malik Ghulam Behlol, Alison Fox, Faiza Masood and Sabiha Arshad*

ABSTRACT

This study examines the challenges associated with implementing learning-supportive assessment during teaching practicum, while also exploring the roles of University Tutors (UT), Cooperative Teachers (CT), Prospective Teachers (PT), and Heads of Practicum Schools (HPS) in selected universities in Pakistan and the United Kingdom (UK). Using the qualitative case study approach, data was collected through lesson observations of UT in pre-service teacher education settings and PT in practicum schools. Additionally, interviews were conducted with UT and HPS, and a Focus Group Discussion (FGD) was held with PT. The study concludes that, in comparison to their UK counterparts, PT in Pakistan encounter significant barriers to implementing learning-supportive assessment in practicum school settings. These barriers include large class sizes, a lack of institutionalised collaboration between universities and schools, inadequate lesson modelling, ineffective feedback practices, assignments that emphasise lower-order thinking skills, and limited opportunities to utilise technology in school settings. Based on the findings, the study recommends the implementation of a new assessment policy that expands examinations beyond mere knowledge recall to include competency assessment. This policy should incorporate adherence to Pakistani teacher standards and the use of reflective portfolios. Moreover, it is advised to provide training for UT and CT in enacting assessment techniques rather than solely providing theoretical knowledge. Additionally, the study proposes the development of problem-solving assignments or projects that require PT to engage in reflection, critical thinking, imagination, and multidimensional contributions.

Keywords: Teaching Practicum, Assessment, Pre-Service Teacher Education, Theory-Practice Gap.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Discoveries in the field of cognitive science have brought about revolutionary changes in learning and assessment practices that have replaced traditional testing and examination practices with student-centred active learning approaches (Sweller 2009; Anderson and Krathwohl 2001). Now assessment, instead of a reward-punishment and fault-finding activity, has become a learning supportive process to facilitate a learner to achieve learning goals (Burke and Fanshawe 2021; Ayalon and Wilkie 2020). Contrary to the above discussed view, assessment practices at different levels of education in Pakistan (primary, secondary, tertiary) have become excessively anxiety-laden, and stressful processes for learners (Bashir 2002; Chohan and Shiekh 2019). Several studies attribute this situation to the outcome of the preparation of teachers during the practicum in the pre-service teacher education programmes. Several factors hinder the enactment of learning-supportive assessment practices. Predominantly, in many instances, teachers are not afforded the opportunity to adopt these practices due to the traditional roles of the Cooperative Teachers (CT), and University Tutors (UT) (Chohan and Shiekh 2019; Behlol and Cajkler 2018). Key contributors to this challenge include teacher educators, who not only design but also teach and implement the assessment practices in pre-service teacher education. They often emphasise teaching to test rather than teaching for genuine understanding. This focus, combined with the prevalent grading race among students, exerts undue pressure, becoming counterproductive to genuine learning.

Further complicating the issue are other elements like the stance of policymakers, the nature of the curriculum, and parental expectations. It is also noteworthy that the assessment of higher-order thinking skills, such as analytical, critical, creative, and problem-solving abilities, often does not receive adequate emphasis in teaching and evaluation at practicum schools. As a result, there is a prevalent trend of Prospective Teachers (PTs) merely regurgitating rote-learned content to secure high grades, without a true grasp of the subject matter (Naeemullah et al., 2010; Bashir 2002).

The preparation of teachers, based on National Professional Standards for Teachers in Pakistan (NPST), approved by the Higher Education Commission (HEC) of Pakistan, is the sole responsibility of Teacher Education Institutions (TEI). The NPST is aimed at obtaining competence in ten broad areas: subject matter knowledge; human growth and development; knowledge of Islamic values; instructional planning and strategies; assessment; learning environment; effective communication and proficient use of information communication technologies; collaboration and partnerships; continuous professional development; and code of conduct. Among the approved NPST, ensuring assessment competence is one of the significant areas in pre-service teachers education programmes (GoP 2009). For instance, pre-service B.Ed four-year programme, consisting of 134 credit hours, eight semesters, designed with United States Agency for

International Development (USAID)'s assistance, emphasises the theoretical aspects of assessment and testing with less attention to the practical aspects such as constructing questions that may promote the teaching and assessment of higher-order thinking skills (Chohan and Shiekh 2019; Behlol and Cajkler 2018). It has also been observed that assessment techniques currently taught in pre-service teacher education programmes are not fully employed because of poor and minimum practice at teaching practicum; and the role of CT (schoolteachers who mentor prospective teachers at teaching practicum) is also almost missing. Further, it has been argued that in Pakistani settings, the training provided often fails to enable the PTs to adapt learned assessment strategies and theoretical understandings of assessment to classroom situations. Therefore, PTs tend to continue with traditional methods of assessment which negates the whole purpose of training (Chohan and Shiekh 2019).

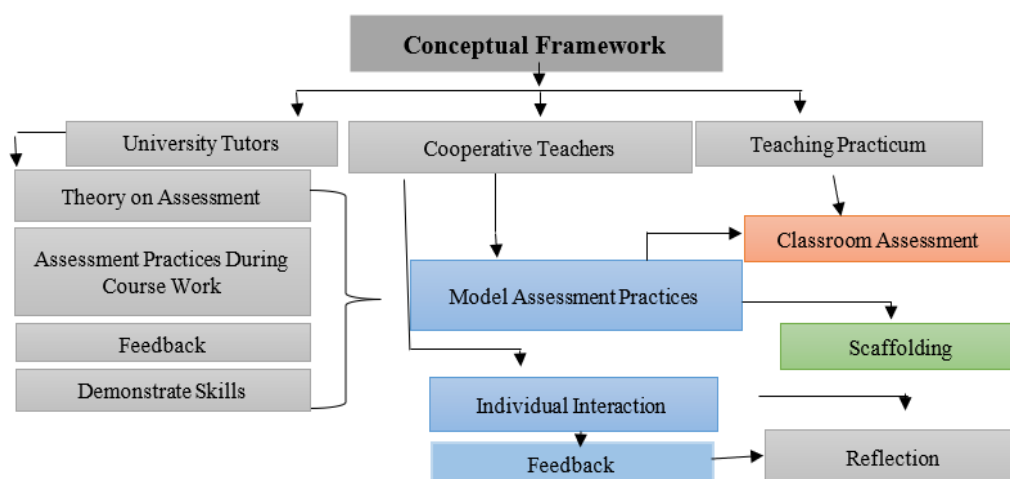
This line of argumentation, thus, points towards a pressing concern: How can PTs be evaluated effectively to enhance their knowledge, comprehension, and hands-on skills, ultimately fostering improved classroom assessment techniques during their teaching practicum? Thus, the focus of this paper is to explore the barriers in applying and adapting assessment techniques to teaching practices while investigating the role of UT, CT, PT, and Heads of Practicum Schools (HPS). This places a particular emphasis on the teaching practicum elements of pre-service teacher education programmes. Thus, the role of CTs in schools, partnered with higher education Teacher Education Providers (TEPs), is vital in facilitating opportunities for PTs to refine their practice. This study delves into the methodologies adopted by UK-based TEPs, focusing on how they translate theoretical knowledge into practical application regarding assessment techniques for PTs in the Post Graduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) Programme. The goal is to glean insights that can guide reforms in PT preparation by TEPs in Pakistan. By doing so, this research aims to foster a comprehensive dialogue among teachers and educators, bridging the theoretical-practical divide and influencing classroom strategies, ultimately steering policy development. The findings reported in this paper are related to the following research questions:

1. How do prospective teachers in Pakistan and the UK learn about assessment in a pre-service teacher education programme?
2. How do cooperative teachers and university tutors in Pakistan and UK support prospective teachers on teaching practicum to learn about how to use assessment?

2. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The conceptual framework identifies the main concepts and explains their relationships in the study:

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework



Source: Authors' own.

The UT is responsible for teaching the theoretical underpinning of the Assessment Course and supervising the application of assessment activities in the teaching practicum, whereas the conceptualisation of the assessment theories and techniques along with the application of the knowledge are the major requirements for teaching this course. This coordination leads to the view that poor theoretical understanding and limited or lack of demonstration activities are the major barriers to learning and practice assessment for the PT at teaching practicum. Therefore, the role of UT in this context is required to be explored in the Teacher Education Institutions (TEIs) of both countries. Further, the UTs are supported by the CTs to supervise and facilitate PTs to enact assessment, therefore, modelling and coaching interaction based on the Vygotsky views of 'scaffolding' are required on the part of CTs. Thus, the scaffolding practices of CTs, in providing learning opportunities to PTs for practising assessment techniques, are checked too. Bridging the knowledge and practice gap may enable the PTs to acquire autonomy gradually as assessment experts through collaborative interaction and reflection.

3. METHODOLOGY

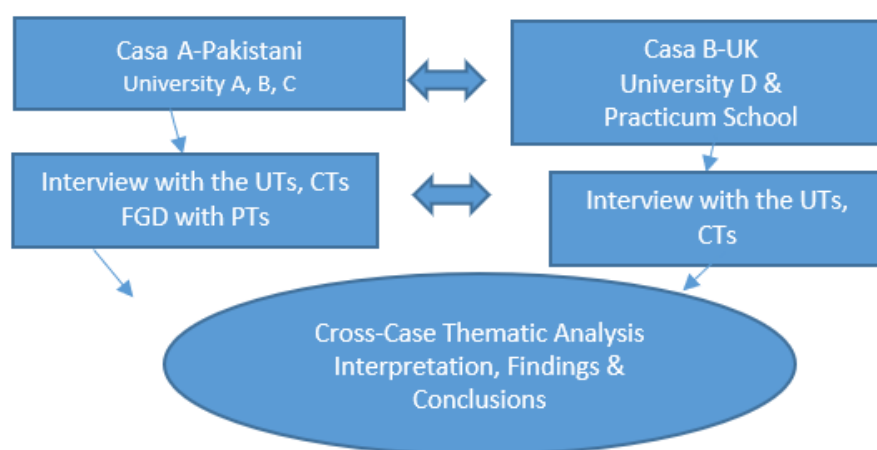
A multiple embedded case study design was considered appropriate to investigate the complex nature of the research problem that required holistic investigation and involved more than one sub-unit of analysis within the case. The design was useful in understanding PT, UT, CT perspectives, learning and practicing assessment at teaching practicum in B.Ed four-year pre-service programme in comparative perspective. Patton (1999) recommends that the case study is the best method when the researcher intends to:

1. define the topic broadly and not narrowly;

2. cover complex and contextual conditions; and,
3. rely on multiple sources of evidence rather than single.

Furthermore, the embedded nature of the design allows researchers to combine multiple means of data to triangulate the study results.

Figure 2: Overview of the Research Design



Source: Authors' own.

3.1 Case Selection

Two cases were selected from Pakistan and UK TEPs. Case A included three universities (University A, B, C-Pakistan) and practicum schools. Case B included the University D-UK and practicum schools. PT, CT, UT, and HPS supervising teaching practicum for learning and practising assessment at teaching practicum were selected by applying purposive sampling technique. By the use of the purposive sampling technique, the study was in a position to select only those PT who were participating in the last term of their teaching practicum and were studying in the 7th or 8th semesters of B.Ed (Hons) programme. The key advantages of selecting the most senior badges was that they possessed comprehensive experiences of the assessment practices and provided detailed and in-depth input.

Consequently, the CP, UT and HPS supervising these PT were the logical selection for the sample of the study. According to Creswell and Clark (2007, p. 125), 'purposive sampling helps the researcher to select the individuals and sites for research because it can purposively inform an understanding of the research problem'. Eight heads of institutions (four males and four females) participated from Pakistani schools, whereas the heads and senior teachers of the cooperating schools linked to University D-UK participated in the study at the time of orientation training. Major and sub-themes were

discussed, triangulated in detail to draw findings and conclusions of the study. A summary of the data collected in phase three of the study is presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Summary: PT Teaching Session Observations and Interviews (Pakistan & UK)

Pakistan				UK (UoL)		
	Sessions	Time	Participants	Sessions	Time	Participants
TEP session observed	5	400 mins.	230	5	260 mins.	174
School sessions observed	5	240 mins.	440	5	240 mins.	180
UTs interviewed	-	255 mins.	8	-	225 mins.	8
School CTs interviewed	-	150 mins.	8	-	195 mins.	7
School leaders	-	130 mins.	4	-	145 mins.	4
FGDs with PTs	1	51 mins.	11	1	55 mins.	10

Source: Study Data.

3.2 Instruments

The research team formulated semi-structured interviews and FGD schedules in consultation with the wider steering group to collect richer information about the situation from those involved in teacher education provision. The primary constructs of the interview questionnaire were:

1. Challenges of assessment practices,
2. Assessment techniques and their practice,
3. Grade and accountability focused assessment,
4. Role of assessment criteria,
5. Nature of PT assignments,
6. Support from cooperative teachers in learning about assessment,
7. Dialogical approach to learning about assessment, and,
8. Role of feedback.

The instrument was reviewed by the experts of university D-UK and experts of University A- Pakistan. It helped to identify issues associated with the learning of assessment techniques and their application on teaching practicum by the PTs with the support and guidance provided by the UTs and CTs. Open-ended interviews were

conducted with the UTs and CTs to explore the perspectives and understanding of assessment at teaching practicum. Open-ended questions provided the researchers freedom to change the question approach as per the need of the situation (Creswell and Clark 2007) and to dig deep into the teachers' perspectives. Focus Group Discussions (one in each institution) with PTs were also conducted to cross-check the data provided by UTs and CTs. The major constructs of FGDs were aligned with the constructs of the interviews.

The research team formulated the Observation Protocol with the support of review literature and in consultation with experts of the universities participating in the research from Pakistan and the UK. The primary constructs of the observation protocol were:

1. Planning of assessment practices in teaching practicum,
2. Implementation of assessment techniques,
3. Grading and feedback practices,
4. Application of assessment criteria,
5. Dialogical discussion.

The instrument was reviewed by the experts of university D-UK and experts of University A- Pakistan to overcome language ambiguities and conceptual clarity.

3.3 Data Collection and Analysis

The members of the research team collected data after gaining approval from the relevant research ethics review boards of the Fatima Jinnah Women University (FJWU) and University of London (UoL). The researchers aimed to maintain impartiality during interviews, minimising personal biases. While ensuring neutrality in attitude, they took note of participants' voice pitch and body language, recording observations in field notes.

This paper utilises data from a broader study that investigated the enacted curriculum through class observations of UTs, interviews with both CTs and UTs, and FGDs with PTs. This comprehensive approach provided a deeper understanding of assessment practices and bridged the gap between theory and practice. All interviews with UTs, CTs, and the FGDs with PTs were audio-recorded and subsequently transcribed.

Cross-case thematic analysis was executed using open coding, axial coding, analytical coding, and selective coding. While approximately 90% of the coding was consistent, minor discrepancies were resolved through discussions. Themes were derived from codes within the transcribed interview data. Subsequently, data from various sources was triangulated to substantiate the answers to the research questions.

3.4 Analysis of Qualitative Data

The themes which emerged from this integration of qualitative interviews, FGDs and learning session observations in the three TEPs from Pakistan and one TEP from the UK, and eight practicum schools in Pakistan and 13 practicum schools of UK were as under:

1. Introducing assessment techniques and their practice,
2. Grade and accountability focused assessment,
3. Role of assessment criteria in assessment practices,
4. Nature of PT assignments,
5. Support from cooperative teachers in learning about assessment,
6. Dialogical approach to learning about assessment, and,
7. Role of feedback.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this paper, each of the emerged themes was discussed in relation to both the Pakistani and British perspectives, drawing from the evidence collected.

4.1 Introducing Assessment Techniques and their Practice

Perspective from Pakistan: Teacher educators (or UTs) reported that they taught a range of assessment techniques such as portfolio assessment, reflective journals, interview skills, observation and peer assessment in the B.Ed programme. However, all these techniques were not reflected in the reported practices at the teaching practicum. The PTs were of the view that reflective journal, interview skills were not practiced and supported by the UTs and CTs at teaching practicum. Although, this was valued by UTs as an important component that may enhance PTs learning and application of assessment practices was made mandatory for all students, yet PTs felt that the above mentioned assessment techniques were not regularly or systematically included in their teaching practice. The reflective journal supported by UTs aimed to equip the PTs with theoretical knowledge about these modern assessment techniques but was not contributing to the development of the skills about how to use such techniques and assess any progress in such application.

It was also observed that time allocated for the practice of assessment skills was also not sufficient enough for learning and developing expertise. This was linked to a lack of modelling by UTs and CTs for the PTs, which implies that there is a need for further training of the UTs and CTs that could see them more directly applying the assessment practices in classroom situations both in the TEP and in schools. According to one PT respondent:

‘We need more practice in class in a safe environment (microteaching) to improve assessment skills. It is needed to place practicum earlier for us to develop our practice. We need individual attention and clear understanding about the key concepts taught in pre-service teacher education programmes.’

Perspective from the UK: UTs from the UK, as in Pakistan, accepted that it was difficult for PTs to apply the assessment techniques that had been learnt in university lessons because of classroom situations that demanded multiple activities such as scaffolding, behaviour management, classroom management, grooming confidence, command of the topic, and sufficient time, teacher standards and accountability. They argued that they solved these challenges by providing modelling opportunities to PTs. According to one UT A respondent:

‘We demand from the PTs not only to explain the assessment concepts but also apply these in the classroom in the form of writing learning outcomes, design assessment techniques, measure learning and provide feedback for enhancing learning.’

Modelling is a standard expectation from both UTs and CTs in the UK, and it forms part of CT and UT training. More regularly in UK, TEPs used portfolio assessments, reflective journals, interview skill observations and peer assessment to assess students’ learning during the teaching practicum. The reflective journal is a very important component to enhance PTs’ learning and implementation of assessment practices. PTs were expected to complete ongoing critical evaluations not only of what they had experienced in taught sessions as part of the programme but also of their observations of classroom practice led by in-service teachers and their own trial classroom experiences. PTs learnt how to conduct such critical self-evaluations through feedback on their reflective journal, as part of a wider portfolio reviewed regularly. The reflective journal formed a stimulus for debate and discussion of practical and theoretical aspects to sharpen the assessment skills of the PT.

4.2 Grade and Accountability Focused Assessment Practices

Grade and accountability-gearred assessment practices have significant effects on teaching and assessment. They may focus the UTs, CTs, PTs and HCS’ attention on getting grades instead of experiencing and learning of innovative, authentic and performance-based approaches to learning and assessment.

Perspective from Pakistan: The teacher educators were of the view that PTs were assessed in terms of grades based on semester results. The PT and the entire education system, including the policymakers, parents and teacher educators focused their attention to grades. The latter were displayed by institutions in print and electronic media, walls to

establish their reputation in society. However, the study found that grade-focused assessment has led to the promotion of rote learning habits, use of unfair means for making progress, and potential nervous breakdown of both students and teachers. In fact, it can be argued that a focus on learning of knowledge, skills and dispositions (including higher order thinking skills) are not valued so much so that they are not incorporated in these high-stakes examinations. This situation is perpetuated in teacher education settings, in which the assessments are organised on a similar basis and with similar values, leading to a similar de-prioritisation of competency and higher-order thinking skills development.

Perspective from the UK: It was noted that practical examinations of skill competency were on the decline in UK TEI examination as a result of recent curriculum changes. However, a range of the Blooms' level skills had been integrated into examination design. Performance and competence, of course, were in-built for the assessment of teacher education programmes and teachers needed to meet the standards of Qualified Teacher Status. Regardless of their route to teaching, they were being examined by portfolio and observation of practice. In addition, they could study teaching academically to gain further qualifications, e.g., through B.Ed or postgraduate courses which included additional academic submissions like written essays and reports of inquiries into practice. There was, therefore, a disconnect between PT and school student forms of assessment, unlike the situation in Pakistan, in response to the development of professional accreditation and academic assessment in line with regulation and developments in UK professionals (in this case the Department for Education) and higher education institutional practice more generally.

4.3 Role of Assessment Criteria

The assessment criteria used for grading has a significant influence on learning and assessment.

Perspective from Pakistan: It was found that the awareness and use of criteria for teaching assessment to PTs lacked clarity. UTs were of the view that they provided theoretical explanation and practical orientation for teaching 'criteria' for valid assessment. However, PTs did not agree with these views and pointed out that practice about the identification of criteria and writing descriptors had not been provided. Resultantly, evaluation of the essay type questions to assess the performance of the students at teaching practicum in majority of the cases was subjective. Particularly, there was no inclusion of assessment of the reflective skills of the PTs either during the programme nor as they completed it and entered into the teaching field. The study found that, unlike the UK situation, assessment criteria were not linked to Teacher Standards formulated by the Higher Education Commission of Pakistan.

Perspective from the UK: In the UK, teacher standards were divided into eight categories, each with descriptors outlining what a teacher should be capable of in relation to each standard. PTs were trained based on these assessment standards and actively participated in both pre- and in-service teacher preparation from the outset of their pre-service teacher education programme. They were encouraged to be reflective and to self-evaluate against the provided standards. They were also trained to use descriptors to gauge learning on achievement tests. This approach did not hinge solely on evaluations and grades of individual lessons but considered performance over time, emphasising the use of reflective journals and portfolios. Contrary to the practice in Pakistan, CTs in the UK were responsible for filling out assessment forms and grading students' performance in each practicum setting. In this manner, PTs embarked on a journey of professional development that sustained them through their in-service career, transitioning from apprenticeship to competency and continuous reflection. Therefore, both school mentors and UTs played a crucial role in quality assurance. This was facilitated by an ongoing process of professional and programme development, fostered by the collaboration between the TEP and its partner schools.

4.4 Nature of PT Assignments

Perspective from Pakistan: The study found that traditional assessment techniques emphasised factual knowledge-based assignments, neglecting practical learning for PTs. As a result, there was a highlighted need to redesign assignments that extended beyond mere knowledge recall, highlighting competency-based assessment and evaluation of higher-order thinking skills. The prevalent assignments were closely tied to textbook content, sidelining the importance of skills and knowledge application. Notably, these assignments did not necessitate PT reflection and often lacked relevance to real-life classroom scenarios. This indicates that PTs should engage in self-evaluation, and both UTs and CTs should be receptive to introspection, assessing their own practices and modes of teaching. This self-assessment ought to encompass the comprehensive spectrum of teaching competencies outlined in the Pakistan teacher standards, including relationship building, professionalism, and an ongoing commitment to professional development.

Perspective from the UK: UTs reference the handbook that PTs carry to their practicum placements. This handbook contains sections detailing a variety of tasks, including those related to Science, Maths, English, and professional activities like report-writing. Additionally, it offers a weekly checklist and provides templates for PTs to draft their lesson plans and conduct self-evaluations. According to one UT C respondent:

‘Before sending PTs to a practicum placement, for example, with science, we would go through the task with the students. We would talk them through the expectations of the task and why they’re doing that task and link it.’

Prospective Teachers' Learning and Practicing Assessment in Teaching Practicum

In the UK, PTs reflective practices were guided and supported by the UT and CT in an organised and systematic pattern. Their first placement tasks led to the first assignment where PTs reflected on the theoretical approaches covered in the programme about what they observed in the classroom, linking theories to the practice they had seen and showing their understanding through a written assignment. The tasks were enacted in any classroom and based on observations of individual children or groups of children. According to one UT C respondent:

‘Every assignment from each student is very, very different because they have done different things and they have made different observations and they have drawn out and analysed what the children have done in different ways. So, although the task is the same for every student, the way that it is enacted is quite different and it is really fascinating to read different assignments and how the same task actually has been carried out and interpreted differently.’

4.5 Support from CTs in Learning about Assessment

Perspective from Pakistan: Teacher educators believed that the current B.Ed programme did not systematically incorporate support from CTs for learning assessment. PTs were sent to cooperative schools without providing any orientation or capacity building training for the CTs. In certain schools, PTs on practicum were perceived as an opportunity to lighten the CTs' hefty teaching load. However, in other institutions, these practicum periods were considered disruptive and detrimental to both students and the schools' routine. This lack of support and guidance on the part of CTs results in challenging situations for learning assessment at teaching practicum.

Perspective from the UK: Assessment mentoring is an effective and efficient component of the Post Graduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) at the UoL. At the start of each practicum session, CTs were invited by the University for training to begin their work with each new cohort of PTs. These training sessions were designed based on feedback from previous sessions and were updated in light of issues and needs raised by the cooperative primary and secondary schools. The mentors were trained to work with PTs for their professional development and were briefed about their role in PT evaluation. The mentors' responsibilities were clearly outlined with sequenced activities to engage in with PTs. Each mentor took on no more than two students, and the school was paid a fee per student. For this purpose, the University selected schools, and the mentors were appointed after consultations between UTs and CSHs. As a result, the mentors received recognition for this role as part of their professional development and its service to the profession.

4.6 Dialogical Approach to Learning about Assessment

Perspective from Pakistan: The collected evidence supported the hypothesis that PTs found it difficult to practice teaching and assessment techniques in government school settings on account of a chain of barriers. According to UTs, large class size, lack of continuity in practice, lack of opportunity to be involved in planning sessions, limited opportunities to use technology in school settings and opportunities to expand a repertoire of no/low-cost resources, and insufficient time for practice were major barriers in the path of student-centred assessment techniques application. However, the key finding was that multiple perspectives needed to address these challenges were not brought together sufficiently to explore solutions. In particular, those who supported trainees in schools were found to have limited awareness of, and therefore commitment to, the aspirations of the B.Ed curriculum. What is needed is a shift from a culture of obligation to a culture of collaboration between the university and school participants in initial teacher education, which establishes a learning orientation for all involved in Pakistan.

Perspective from the UK: Teacher educators from the UK talked about the importance of dialogic teaching to strengthen assessment practices of PTs. This involves the theoretical rationale for dialogic teaching and associated group work, collaboration, and dialogic strategies to be presented to students based on the published research in this area for PTs to discuss. After returning from their placements, having engaged in directed tasks that required them to plan and reflect on group work, PTs participated in group reflections. They discussed questions like, ‘How did you execute that? How was your experience? What actions did you take? What went well?’

In this way, in cycles of theory, practice and reflection, a range of teaching and assessment strategies were developed throughout the year. This pedagogic process built into the TEP provision accepted that although learning might happen individually, it did not happen in isolation. Like the school students, they are to teach, PTs learnt a great deal from others around them. Further, teachers, whether UTs in TEPs or CTs and PTs themselves in schools, together with textbooks, were not considered the only source of education because knowledge was often constructed during shared experiences through the interplay of many minds confronting a challenge together. Furthermore, social learning was considered a powerful vehicle for such learning. In the school classrooms, PTs entered as teachers; ongoing feedback and engagement between teacher and learner provided the social safety net which allowed learners to take risks in their learning and gave teachers the opportunities to add to the discussions from their expert knowledge. This saw assessment practices as embedded in the process of teaching and learning with an important formative role.

4.7. Role of Feedback

Perspective from Pakistan: UTs indicated that gathering feedback from PTs and offering feedback in return was crucial for enhancing learning. However, PTs felt that CTs did not consistently give both oral and written feedback during the teaching practicum. While CTs seemed to give PTs oral feedback on their practicum, it did not typically encompass formalised target setting or progress towards achieving standards. This was attributed to CTs not being adequately trained for such feedback processes. Consequently, PTs lacked the chance to pinpoint their areas of weakness and strategise on rectifying them. The continuity of feedback, akin to what was observed in the UK setting, was absent.

Microteaching practices were thought to be an effective technique to overcome weaknesses in applying theory to practice in terms of practical teaching skills and an opportunity for feedback to PTs. However, it was found to be inconsistently used in B.Ed, assumed to be a lack of confidence and training on the part of UTs.

One issue with the practicum in terms of developing meaningful CT-PT relationships and opportunities for practicing feedback was the limited duration of each placement. PTs need to experiment with new ideas, try them out and see how they work in different contexts with proper feedback. This requires time to practice, reflect, argue, and try again through receiving continuous feedback. Indeed, it can be asserted that PTs, CTs, and UTs should be empowered to openly embrace various learning practices. This includes reflecting on personal successes and failures, articulating new concepts to peers, seeking assistance from peers and teachers, and actively participating in discussions and group work. This might require further development of CT and UT skills.

Perspective from the UK: During interviews, both UTs and CTs, akin to their Pakistani counterparts, expressed that they recognised the significance of providing feedback to PTs concerning their assessment practices. CTs provided feedback to PTs to aid in their reflection on classroom methodologies and organised microteaching sessions, either in schools or within the TEP, to address identified areas of improvement. For PT practical work or presentations, the feedback encompassed criteria such as content quality, multimedia utilisation, eye contact, student engagement, and responsiveness to questions. On the value of CT and UT feedback, one PT C shared that:

‘We need the kind of feedback that tells us our strengths, weaknesses, and how to overcome them. Self-learning in a friendly environment promotes and enhances feedback and consequently, learning. We need someone sitting behind when we are microteaching, pointing out mistakes and guiding how to develop. We need criteria and the proforma for all assessment tasks, which makes assessment fairer.’

5 CONCLUSION

PTs face difficulties in applying student-centred assessment practices owing to several factors in the four-year B.Ed programme in Pakistan. These include: a lack of modelling in both TEP and cooperative school settings; challenges related to the large class sizes in schools; lack of continuity and alignment of provision between cooperating schools and TEPs as part of the programme; and insufficient time in teaching practicum experiences. The results align with the findings of Burke and Fanshawe (2021) as well as Arnold and Mundy (2020), which indicate that the absence of modelling opportunities for PTs hinders their ability to learn praxis and student-centred assessment.

PTs enrolled in the UK setting also face difficulties in bridging the gap between theory and practice about assessment practices. However, the PTs' modelling and practice of assessment techniques in UK are more rigorous, structured, and effectively supervised. Theoretical underpinning guide and facilitate the enhancement of assessment competence that is missing in the practice of Pakistani counterparts.

The use of a reflective journal is more regular in the UK TEP than in Pakistan. By reflective journal, PTs learn implementation of assessment practices and conduct ongoing critical evaluations of what they have experienced in taught sessions as part of the programme and their own observations of classroom practice led by in-service teachers and their own trial classroom experiences. Studies conducted by Gogus (2012), Harris et al. (2018) also noted that “‘transfer’ of experiential learning to bridge theory practice gap require meaningful activities that ‘involve students in ‘real’ experiences and encourage reflection on those experiences in order to facilitate meaningful learning” (p.13) . In Pakistan, the reflective journal is valued by UTs as an important component that may enhance PTs learning and application of assessment practices. However, it is not regularly or systematically included in their teaching practice. PTs are equipped with theoretical knowledge about these modern assessment techniques but are not made to develop their skills to use such techniques and assess any progress in such application. As a result, PTs continue to practice traditional assessment techniques (paper and pencil test) at teaching practicum that may not support and enhance the learners' academic achievement, despite holding appropriate knowledge about a wider range of practices.

PTs need to develop their expertise to assess the learning of students in school settings by consuming enough time for the practice of assessment skills and a more structured provision of their opportunities to observe, experiment and reflect on assessment practices during the practicum in Pakistan, as has been done in the UK. This could involve systematic observation of practice in teaching practicum by CTs, then discussion with PTs and UTs to inform evaluation and self-evaluation. The findings of this study are consistent with those of Masood and Behlol (2020) and Naeemullah et al., (2010), which stressed the need for PTs to hone their expertise in assessing student learning in school

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environments by dedicating sufficient time to practice assessment skills during their teaching practicum.

Grade-focused high-stakes assessment in Pakistan is detrimental to learning higher-order thinking of creativity, critical problem-solving, and imaginative skills. The approach stifles the creative, innovative, and critical thinking potential of the PTs, and also leading to the promotion of rote learning habits, use of unfair means, and potential nervous breakdown of both students and teachers. Bashir (2002), Chohan and Shiekh (2019) also found that grade-focused high-stakes assessment in Pakistan was detrimental to learning higher-order thinking of creativity, critical and problem-solving skills. Whereas in the UK, PTs have enough space to learn and assess higher order thinking skills in performativity mode based on 'Qualified Teacher Status.'

Ideally, the evaluation of PTs entering the profession should align with the teacher education standards prescribed by the Pakistan Ministry for Education (Government of Pakistan 2009). At present, assessments don't adhere to these standards. The optimal approach would involve collaboration among all stakeholders in teacher education, ensuring that everyone understands the teachers' requirements and actively contributes to determining how this assessment can be effectively implemented in practice. The findings of this study align with the conclusions of Bashir (2002), Behlol and Cajkler (2018), and Chohan and Shiekh (2019), all of whom advocate for the assessment of PTs entering the profession to be in sync with the teacher education standards set by the Pakistan Ministry for Education. In the UK, PTs in the PGCE programme don't undergo a written examination. Instead, they are assessed and graded based on National Teacher Standards, which are categorised into eight sections, each detailing the competencies a teacher should possess concerning each standard.

In conclusion, a more collaborative school-university partnership model could be developed in which the professional development of PTs, CTs and UTs are considered and fulfilled together. Just as in the UK, Pakistani CTs should be afforded a status that allows them to take pride in mentoring newcomers to their profession and the institutions where they work. The Department of Education needs to acknowledge their invaluable contributions towards sustaining the profession. This may lead to CTs and UTs having an equal role in the support and evaluation of PTs as well as PTs, CTs, CSHs and UTs all having a place in the programme's development.

The nature of assignments in Pakistan is theory-based, checking factual information, and repeated textbook-based questions. According to Masood and Behlol (2020) theory-laden assignments have little scope for promoting practice in PTs enrolled in pre-service teacher education programmes. Whereas in UK, assignments are well structured, based on emerging challenges of classroom learning and research-orientation.

In Pakistan, the evaluation role expected to be performed by CTs is also missing due to the lack of alignment between school and TEP elements of the B.Ed programme. This is a missed opportunity for using communication technologies to maintain connections amongst PTs, CTs and UTs both for coordination of the programme and professional development of all concerned. However, in UoL, the role of CTs is an effective, efficient, systematic, professional and financially recognized component of the PGCE programme. They are trained in how to work with PTs for their professional development and briefed about their role in PT evaluation.

6 RECOMMENDATIONS

There is a pressing need for a revamped assessment policy, one that goes beyond mere knowledge recall to encompass competency evaluations. This could entail adherence to Pakistani teacher standards and the integration of a reflective portfolio, elements of which are, to some extent, already present in Pakistan. UTs and CTs must receive training that equips them to offer practical assessment learning opportunities to PTs, ensuring they can apply assessment techniques rather than merely understanding them theoretically. A mere theoretical grasp on reflective journal writing by PTs, CTs, and UTs is inadequate to cultivate the requisite competence in reflective journal writing within the four-year B.Ed programme. UTs and CTs working with PTs have to learn the *practice* and *modelling* of the students-centred assessment practices such as the writing of critical journals, critical review assignments, interview skills and conducting case study action research. Assignments that are solely based on textbook wording and factual knowledge should give way to problem-solving projects that demand PTs to engage in reflection, critical thinking, creativity, and multidimensional analyses. Tools like observation feedback forms and training in lesson analysis can serve as effective means to support and assess classroom practices.

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