

The Role of Practicum Training in Developing the Professional Skills of the Student Teacher: Monitors' and Student Teachers' Perspectives

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ABSTRACT The aim of the study was to investigate monitors' and student teachers' perspectives regarding the role of practicum training in developing the professional skills of the student teacher. A total of 48 female students from the Kindergarten Program at the Majmaah University (who spent the training period in cooperative kindergartens in the cities of Al Majmaah, that is, MA, and Al Zulfi, that is, ZL) as well as six mentors participated in the study. Mixed mode approach was employed. Monitors and student teachers ascertained and emphasised the role of practicum training in developing positive attitudes towards the teaching profession, developing the instrumental competencies of the student teacher, adapting the student teacher to the environment of kindergarten, and achieving emotional balance for student teacher.

A teacher is considered to be the main element in the educational process as the main pillar in building and developing education, and teacher preparation programs occupy an important and essential position, as the role of the teacher is no longer limited to transmitting information, but rather to help students learn on their own and give them opportunities for discussion and dialogue. This prompted educators to pay attention to teacher preparation programs and the role of practical education in this preparation, considering it the test that tests the success of the institute or college in preparing the trainee student to become a teacher (Pupíková et al. 2021; Natto 2022).

The kindergarten teacher is an essential pillar of the kindergarten's achievement of its goals, as they perform many overlapping roles and many varied tasks that require different technical skills that are difficult to define accurately and in detail. The teacher in the kindergarten is responsible for everything that the children learn, in addition to the task of guiding the growth process of each of the children at a sensitive stage in their lives. It requires special preparation with a high level of euphemism that enables them to exploit their understanding of the nature of the child's development and the available sources of information in an innovative and creative way (Eitan and Aviva 2017).

Practical education for kindergarten is the test by which one can test the extent of the success of those colleges in preparing the student teacher (Smith and Lev Ari 2005). It is the crucible in which all theoretical and practical knowledge is fused with the reality of the teaching profession. Then the era of quality had its repercussions also on the field training of kindergarten teachers, which has become their new role in the light of contemporary international standards, and therefore the urgent need to activate the system of training in-service kindergarten teachers so that courses are held through which the teacher controls the most important modern trends and contemporary global standards in teaching the skills and rules of raising and learning kindergarten children (Moen and Standal 2016; Cretu 2021; Saadet 2021).

Problem Statement

Training the student teacher in kindergarten before graduation is one of the necessities that contribute to providing the teacher with many experiences and skills that contribute to preparing them to practice multiple tasks while teaching kindergarten. From the author experience and meeting with student-teachers, they prefer that

the field training starts from the first year of university study.

Objectives

The objective of this study was to investigate the monitors' and student teachers' perspectives regarding the role of practicum training in developing the professional skills of the student teacher.

Literature Review

Practicum Training

Field training is an application of the educational studies that the student teacher has undergone at the theoretical level, as it is considered the essence of preparing the teacher professionally in order to know the comprehensive educational goals that education seeks to achieve and to identify the nature of the learners who will deal with them regarding the characteristics of their growth (Moussaid and Zerhouni 2017), tendencies and needs, and familiarity with modern educational methods and good preparation. For lessons and planning, how to prepare physically and psychologically for the lesson and present the content of the lesson in a successful manner with linking the lesson to the lives of students and how to choose and use educational aids with high efficiency (Nonis and Tan 2011), how to raise questions and discussion and urge the student to participate in the lesson and the ability to solve problems facing them, innovation, experimentation and practical applications of theoretical information and ability to do comprehensive evaluation (Pop 2015), their interest in appearance, commitment to appointments, successful dealings, and good relations with superiors and colleagues (Simon and Dan 2017; Lutfi 2018).

The competency-based teacher preparation programs have determined the results that derive from these programs from a procedural point of view (Van et al. 2017), and this type means that the types of knowledge, skills, attitudes and abilities that a teacher expects to have upon graduation have been determined, and the accepted indicators as evidence of achieving these results have become known and accepted. This also means that the abilities and skills that the student

must acquire in colleges and the criteria that are applied to evaluate these abilities and skills have become clear, and the student has become with them responsible for achieving these standards (Loizou 2011). These abilities and skills include the teacher's special skills, concepts, attitudes and types of behaviour, which helps in the student's development in terms of mental, emotional, social and physical aspects (Simon and Dan 2017). Three criteria are used to evaluate the student's level in achieving these competencies and to evaluate the student's cognitive concepts and performance standards to evaluate the educational behaviour that the student teacher uses in teaching and development standards (Fukkink et al. 2019) and the results that are used to evaluate the effectiveness of student teaching by identifying the extent of mental and emotional development of students (Martinez 2016).

The place of practicum training in the preparation curriculum is represented by main elements in all countries of the world (Dan and Simon 2016), which are theoretical and functional preparation, which includes the study of materials and the practice of experiences necessary to build the teacher's teaching personality (Busher et al. 2015), such as stimulating education, discipline, class management, curriculum, special methods and teaching aids, educational psychology, comparative education, principles of education, and theoretical preparation (Aldemir and Kurt 2014). Academic goals include general requirements, specialisation, then optional subjects, as well as practical education, which is the organisational and applied formula that it implements (Bulgakova et al. 2020).

Research Questions

The research questions for this study were:

1. What is the role of practicum training in developing professional skills?
2. Are there statistically significant differences between the mean scores of kindergarten teachers and their mentors regarding the role of practicum training in developing professional skills?

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Since the questions for this study are concerned with finding out the role of practicum train-

ing in developing the professional skills and the differences between the mean scores of kindergarten teachers and their mentors regarding the role of practicum training in developing the professional skills, its framework falls within a mixed mode approach to research. To answer the first question, a qualitative method through questionnaire was employed. To answer the second question, a quantitative method through questionnaire was employed.

Participants

A total of 48 female students from the Kindergarten Program at the Majmaah University (who spend the training period in cooperative kindergartens in the cities of Al Majmaah, that is, MA, and Al Zulfi, that is, ZL) as well as 6 mentors participated in the study. Therefore, the researchers have two different geographical locations, which are Al Majmaah and Al Zulfi cities. They were registered in the practicum training course as a requisite to graduation in 2019.

Instruments and Data Collection

A one-question semi-structured interview, with a question, “what is the role of practicum training in developing professional skills?” and a 24-item questionnaire with a 3-point Likert scale from 3 (completely yes) to 1 (to some extent) were administered to the participants. The questionnaire has four factors, that is, developing positive attitudes towards the teaching profession, developing the performance competencies of the student teacher, the student teacher’s adaptation to the environment of the kindergarten, and achieving the emotional balance of the student teacher. The reliability of the scale in terms of internal consistency was assessed by Cronbach’s α . The items demonstrated a satisfactory level of

internal consistency reliability (Table 1). The content validity of the scale was examined by a group of 10 experts. They assessed the relevance of each item using a four-point Likert scale (where 1 represents “irrelevant” and 4 represents “highly relevant”). They provided suggestions and comments. The 24 items were judged to be quite or highly relevant. A content validity index was calculated at the item level (I-CVI = 0.90).

Procedures

Prior to administering the survey, all participants were informed about the purpose of the study and voluntarily stated that they agree to participate. They were told not to identify themselves in any way on the scale paper. They were also informed that they should not be concerned with anything concerning their participation in the study and their responses are for research purposes only and would be kept confidential. All data were entered in an SPSS file.

Findings from the Interview

When asked, “What is the role of practicum training in developing the professional skills?”, different themes emerged from monitors and student teachers’ answers. Some ascertained and emphasised the role of practicum training in developing positive attitudes towards the teaching profession. Their comments included these statements:

“As to me, practicum training makes the student teacher feels more than happy to be a teacher. It also contributes to the realisation that the profession of the teacher is sacred.” (ST1, M2, 3,4)

“I too see that practicum training makes the student teacher motivate new students to enrol in colleges that qualify female teachers in its various stages.” (ST1, M 5,6, ST 13-16)

Table 1: Reliability analysis

Variable	Cronbach's alpha	Remarks
Developing positive attitudes towards the teaching profession	0.756	Reliable
Developing the performance competencies of the student teacher	0.843	Reliable
Student teacher's adaptation to the environment of the kindergarten	0.856	Reliable
Achieving the emotional balance of the student teacher	0.883	Reliable
Total	0.903	Reliable

Source: The Author

“As to me, practicum training makes student teachers proud within the community for being a teacher. And increases her motivation for the profession of teacher. It also contributes to the activities in the kindergarten positively and happily with the children.” (ST 20, 25, 30, 32, 33, 40, 48)

Some ascertained and emphasised the role of practicum training in developing the instrumental competencies of the student teacher. Their comments included these statements:

“Practicum training helps on how to deal with the individual differences of children, and as to prepare for the activity and distribute it to the time specified for it. It also makes the teacher make different strategies to suit each activity and the age of children.” (ST 26, 27, 28, 29, 42, 44, 46)

“Practicum training increases the positive participation in the various activities of the children. And reduces the fears of practicing professional skills within the kindergarten and activity rooms. Make it able to set activity goals and measure their achievement in children.” (ST 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 41, 42, 44, 45, M1, 3, 6)

Some ascertained and emphasised the role of practicum training in adapting the student teacher to the environment of the kindergarten. Their comments included these statements:

“Practicum training contributes to teacher’s integration into the activities of the kindergarten in a short time. It also helps her interact with her colleagues in various aspects, whether administrative or professional.” (ST 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 41)

“It also increases her interaction with children in the activity rooms and the kindergarten courtyard. As well as reduces the gap between it and the parents of the children. And practicum

training motivates her to participate in the administrative tasks assigned to her.” (ST 26, 27, 28, 29, 42, 44, 46)

“Practicum training reduces student teacher’s fears of practicing the various activities in the kindergarten classroom.” (ST 11, 13, 14, 15, 17)

Some ascertained and emphasised the role of practicum training in achieving emotional balance for the student teacher. Their comments included these statements:

“Practicum training contributes to psychological preparation inside the kindergarten and activity rooms. It also increases the confrontation of psychological pressures while performing various tasks within the kindergarten.” (ST 1, 2, 3, 4, 5)

“Practicum training contributes to increasing the ability to solve problems with the kindergarten community.” (ST 8, 9, 10, M3, 6)

“Practicum training reduces the feeling of embarrassment in the early stages of it inside the kindergarten and raises the degree of self-confidence during the practice of tasks and activities inside the kindergarten. It also makes the student teacher express her fears of practicing the profession of teaching in the kindergarten.” (ST 13, 14, 15, M4, 5)

RESULTS

Findings obtained from the study conducted to determine the differences between the mean scores of kindergarten teachers and their mentors regarding the role of practicum training in developing professional skills are presented in Table 2. It shows t-test results for the differences between the mean scores of kindergarten teach-

Table 2: t-test results for the differences between the mean scores

Sub-scales	Groups	Mean	Std. deviation	t-value	p-value
Developing positive attitudes towards the teaching profession	Monitor	13.65	1.88	7.34	P ≤ 0.01
	Student teacher	10.24	2.67		
Developing the instrumental competencies of the student teacher	Monitor	13.22	1.12	7.22	
	Student teacher	10.77	2.01		
Adapting the student-teacher to the environment of the kindergarten	Monitor	16.02	1.42	8.38	P ≤ 0.01
	Student teacher	11.33	3.62		
Achieving emotional balance for student teacher	Monitor	13.27	1.18	9.42	P ≤ 0.01
	Student teacher	9.54	4.12		
Total score	Monitor	57.29	4.43	12.33	P ≤ 0.01
	Student teacher	38.19	6.81		

ers and their mentors regarding the role of practicum training in developing professional skills. The Table shows that (t) values were as follows for developing positive attitudes towards the teaching profession ($t = 7.34, P \leq 0.01$), developing the instrumental competencies of the student teacher ($t = 7.22, P \leq 0.01$), adapting the student-teacher to the environment of the kindergarten ($t = 8.38, P \leq 0.01$), achieving emotional balance for student teacher ($t = 9.42, P \leq 0.01$), and total score ($t = 12.33, P \leq 0.01$).

DISCUSSION

The aim was to investigate monitors' and student teachers' perspectives regarding the role of practicum training in developing the professional skills of the student teacher. When asked, "What is the role of practicum training in developing the professional skills?", different themes emerged from the monitors' and student teachers' answers. They ascertained and emphasised the role of practicum training in developing positive attitudes towards the teaching profession, developing the instrumental competencies of the student teacher, adapting the student-teacher to the environment of the kindergarten, and achieving emotional balance for student teacher.

This in turn confirms that field training is one of the most important elements of teacher preparation (Bertschy et al. 2013), as it helps prepare the student for the life of the school and society before graduation, and it is the main way to strengthen the student's professional capabilities and prepare him to assume his full responsibilities upon graduation (Zaragoza et al. 2021).

It is clear from these results and the opinions of the teachers and mentors that the student teacher is in dire need of having an emotional balance in order to prepare psychologically and emotionally in order to practice the multiple tasks within the kindergarten classroom (Catalano and Catalano 2015). In addition to that, practicum training develops positive attitudes towards the teaching profession, and contributes to adaptation by the student teacher with the kindergarten environment (Chou 2019), as this will have a positive impact on the teacher's performance in the future. In addition to the above, early field training contributes to the development of the performance competencies of the student teacher in the kindergarten program, especially in the early years of their studies (Denscombe 2014).

The kindergarten teacher must be characterised by emotional balance (Fredrickson and Losada 2005), ability to adapt to work conditions, intelligence, strength of character, good manners, decency, good appearance, and the ability to use the Arabic language properly free of defects, whether in the correct pronunciation or in the exits of letters and the safety of its output, because it will train the children's language skills, and even follow up on their language development.

The preparation of the kindergarten teacher does not only require scientific, academic and educational preparation, but extends to professional and psychological preparation and the development of tendencies and tendencies for the teacher, with a focus on the practical side that ensures the safety of experimenting with the theoretical side on the ground, which motivates them to innovate, create and experiment.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the present study provided evidence that kindergarten teachers must be characterised by emotional balance, ability to adapt to work conditions, intelligence, strength of character, good manners, decency, good appearance, and the ability to use the Arabic language properly free of defects. Monitors and student teachers ascertained and emphasised on the role of practicum training in developing positive attitudes towards the teaching profession, developing the instrumental competencies of the student teacher, adapting the student teacher to the environment of the kindergarten, and achieving emotional balance for student teacher.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Some suggestions can be made in accordance with the findings of this study, that is, practicum is an effective way to help the student acquire new abilities and skills that they did not possess. These skills enable the teacher student to expand their concepts, modify their attitudes, and consolidate their ability to innovate. Practicum training creates the student with a love of useful and beneficial work for the community, and an appreciation of the value of interaction, and the common connection with the society in which it is located, through direct acquaintance with the different cultures and environments, which the individual did

not find an explanation for in the educational curricula, or the rooms of practical laboratories.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The author declares that there are no conflicts of interest.

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