

The Impact of Practicum Experiences on MA Students at KAU

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Abstract

Practicum is a field experience that allows students to observe and document how working professionals perform their job responsibilities. Usually, students get involved or start conducting their practicum practices after they have reached the final stages of theoretical experience, or even after they have finished their studies and started working in their line of profession. In this paper, 10 MA students in TESOL are asked to reflect on their practicum experiences and report on what changes, if any, practicum brought about in terms of their look at their field of profession or in terms of teaching skills in general. The participants in this research are 5 MA male students and 5 MA female students from The English Language Institute at King Abdulaziz University. Students were asked to reflect on their experiences from the angle of five areas, the area of practice and teaching, planning, material development, knowledge (gap between theory and practice) and class management. After analyzing the replies of the students, it was noticed that the students have different opinions on the impact of practicum in their line of work and professional life in general, however, the results were in line with and echo the already established literature we have on the same topic.

Keywords: practicum, training, teaching practice, self-efficacy, testing

1. Introduction

Practicums are structured learning experiences that many career fields require and the field of TESOL is not an exception Köksal (2019). A practicum experience is generally hands-off from the part of the students. While students may offer assistance to their supervisors, practicums emphasize shadowing and observation rather than active participation in a job (Nicolini & Korica, 2024). Usually, practicums are free of charge in Saudi Arabia, which means that students or practicum seekers do not pay anything to get experience out of practicum. However, how do those open practicum opportunities benefit from offering practicum vacancies? In the field of education or after students have reached the final stages of their studies, they usually take a course named practicum to fulfill the requirements of their degree. By taking that course students take and be responsible of a certain amount of actual teaching hours under the supervision of a professional to make sure that they have the skills and knowledge needed for the labor market. These actual hours are usually taken from the load of an experienced teacher and that is how educational institutions benefit from opening practicum opportunities.

When it comes to other organizations either public sector or private institutions the situation could be a little different as stated by the Saudi Department of Human Resources and Development, it is stated that students can apply for practicum placements or professional field experiences after they have graduated and the department will cover all the expenses that may result of the practicum (DHRD, 2024). The same also applies to the health sector in Saudi Arabia, students or doctors are paid to fill in the available vacancies of field experiences or practicum in the different hospitals and health organizations.

In this paper what of interest are practicum, field experiences or practicum placements provided in the field of education, particularly the ones offered at the English Language Institute (ELI) at King Abdulaziz University. Students of a practicum course that was offered in the first semester of the academic year of 2024. In the coming lines we will discuss the approach of research, a review of the already published literature and a conclusion will be preceded by a dissuasion of the reflection.

2. Literature Review

In this section of the paper, the already established research will be discussed and linked to the topic of the paper in hand. Topics such as the history of practicum in the world and Saudi Arabia is of close relevance to the subject of this paper, which is why it is going to be included under the literature review. Further, some other topics will also be discussed such as practicum in education, the perception of practicum by teachers, the financial impact of practicum, self-efficacy, and the role of practicum in teachers' education.

3.1 History of Practicum in Education

Practicum is referred to differently in literature. It is called practicum, field experience, practicum placements and/ or cooperative training (Grant-Smith, de Zwaan, Chapman, & Gillett-Swan, 2018). Regardless of the term used or adopted, all these mentioned terms refer to one thing or the same idea which is a course of study for teachers, doctors, nurses, etc., that

involves working in the field of study and using the knowledge and skills that have been learned in an educational institution (Hodge, Tannehill, & Kluge, 2003). No major difference can be found in the literature regarding the deflection of practicum. All definitions revolve around the idea of or concept of applying knowledge practically before going into the chosen field of work.

The word practicum comes from the Latin word “practicus” which means practical and the word was first used, to convey the concept of practicum discussed here, in the year 1874 (Khan & Qayyum, 2019). It is suggested in the body of research available to us that the rise of mass schooling in the 19th century presented school administrators with the problem of securing and finding qualified teachers, thus, many universities and educational institutions by the 1900s offered formal education to students or those who want to pursue a career in teaching that included subjects of theoretical \and practical nature (Vick, 2006). The departments of education in different countries pushed toward such combination of theoretical and practical experience when asking teachers to fill in vacancies. For example, since 1922 in Australia, the Australian Department of Education specified that the training of torchers should include a range of content subjects, as well as principles of teaching, school management, and methods of teaching, complemented by adequate practice in Teaching, under proper supervision (Vick, 2006). By quite early in the twentieth century, a model of teacher training was established and normalized, involving a multi-dimensional program that integrated theoretical studies with classroom observation and practice (Vick, 2006). Saudi universities and hiring bodies are not an exception to what has been the norm in the field of education. In almost all the degrees that are concerned with education and teachers; training a practicum course that lasts for at least three months is a core component of the degree. Such a combination of theory and practice can be found in the degree offered by the teachers’ colleges and the education colleges that feed those schools with teachers for the different types of schools.

From a historical point of view, practicum, field experiences or even practical teachers’ training took two main forms in the world and Saudi Arabia is not an exception. The first form is the one that describes practicum in Saudi Arabia and some other countries such as England and Australia. The first form could be described as full-time continuous school practice over an extended period. The second form of practicum is fulfilled by weekly visits ranging from half a day to two days, interspersed with college classes. The second form is not used in Saudi Arabian colleges and schools the first form is the rampant one and always followed.

Regardless of what form is followed in any country. Colleges have shown adherence to offering practicum as a core requirement in their teachers’ preparation programs. It is suggested that some universities even offer practicum in the early stages of admission to give their students more room for application and better real-life experience (Vick, 2006).

3.2 Practicum in the Field of ESL

English has been taught in Indonesia since 1924 and remains the most important foreign language at all levels of education. English is taught in Saudi Arabia as a foreign language.

English has become very important in Saudi Arabia, especially in business, politics, education, technology. English is used to communicate with foreigners, to build international relations, and to keep up with the latest developments in science and technology. For these reasons, mastering English is indispensable for Saudis, hence its inclusion in school curricula. This brought about great need for qualified teachers, who can teach English starting from year 1 in public and private schools in Saudi Arabia. All teachers of English in Saudi Arabia are at least holders of bachelor's degree in English with an emphasis on English education. Practicum is a core course in the universities and colleges that offer bachelor's degree in English with emphasis on English education.

The practicum component of a bachelor degree in English with emphasis on English education is comprised of two parts divided over two semesters. The first part which is usually delivered in the first semester of the year aims to equip students with relevant pedagogical skills and dispositions by providing them with opportunities shadow a professional teacher in a real classroom. Held within a relatively short period, approximately 3 months, this course is considered an introductory practicum before student teachers proceed to the next part, which is usually held in the second semester of the academic year. After students have completed the first part of the course and successfully shadowed a professional teacher, they go on and attend a real school and be responsible for a real classroom under the supervision of a professor from the university or college they attend. This professor makes sure that the student adheres to all the requirements of the school and the requirements of the Ministry of Education in Saudi Arabia. The professor then must write a report of observation commenting on the performance of his students. Student cannot graduate until he has fulfilled the requirement of practicum successfully. As stated in both parts of the practicum students work with mentoring teachers at host schools along with visiting mentors from the university to make the practicum a truly professional and rewarding experience.

3.3 Skills and Competences Developed During Practicum in Saudi Arabia

The different departments of English education in Saudi Arabia begin with improving students' language proficiency. Afterwards, teaching related courses follow. Students must acquire the competences and skills needed to conduct effective lessons. Some subjects from the latter group are offered quite early in the program to ensure that students develop certain competences and skills before they start their practicum. The major competences and skills that are systematically developed mostly before practicum in Saudi Arabia are:

- a) **Designing effective lessons:** Language instruction must be well-planned to achieve the desired outcomes. As a result, students of English Education need to learn how to successfully design English lessons. Students take a compulsory course titled Curriculum Design, which familiarizes them with the systematic design of instruction.
- b) **Developing quality ELT materials:** Students focus on various principles and frameworks for developing and evaluating materials. Further, all students have to individually design one EFL coursebook unit, which includes sections on language skills.
- c) **Assessing learners:** all students at the bachelor and master of English education need to

take a course titled Testing and Assessment to fulfill the requirement of their degree.

Many other courses and training are offered to students in order to enter the profession equipped with all the necessary skills.

3.4 Perception of Practicum by Pre-Service Teachers

It is suggested that practicum can be stressful and a time of intense learning for students, who are going to be teachers (Danyluk, 2013). It is reported that when students, who took practicum placement, were asked about how they felt about practicum placement, %71 percent of them reported that practicum experiences are linked to positive feelings (Danyluk, 2013). Even those who reported that negative feelings were there, these negative feelings were not overwhelming (Danyluk, 2013). The most strongly identified negative feeling was associated with worry and anxiousness. Unsurprisingly, given the intensity of the practicum experience and long days associated with planning, travel, and attendance, tiredness was also a feeling strongly associated with practicum participation (Danyluk, 2013).

In another study, students who took practicum placement were asked to report on the best things about practicum. Most of the participants reported that the best thing about practicum was the exposure to the real life of teaching and the associated duties of it (Crebert, Bates, Bell, Patrick, & Cragnolini, 2004). Other benefits and best things about practicum were The opportunity for professional development and to apply knowledge and skills gained in a workplace context (Crebert et al., 2004). One of the interesting things about the study of Crebert et al. (2004) was that participants did not list enhancement of employability as one of the best things when it comes to practicum placement. Participants reported that, in a sense, practicum played the role of confirming the career choice of pre-service teachers. In other words, it showed teachers whether they were cut out for teaching or not.

The same study by Crebert et al. (2004) reported on the worst things participants thought about practicum. Most of the participants reported that financial stress in an unpaid placement is the worst thing about practicum Crebert et al. (2004). Even though it is reported in more than one study that this is one of the main problems faced by students or teachers in practicum, students still look for and go through the experience of practicum as the benefits always outweigh the downsides and this is the case in Saudi Arabia and the rest of the world. Other commonly reported downsides connected to student personal circumstances included the challenges associated with balancing work, life, and study and the stresses associated with meeting the academic requirements of their degree Crebert et al. (2004). To sum up things about the worst things, the best things and the other factors associated with practicum, we may say that what affect practicum experiences for students are factors associated with time, money, experience and conflict with other commitments Crebert et al. (2004).

3.5 Financial Impact of Practicum

It is reported in many studies that the financial impact is one of the important factors that affect the practicum experience for example the study of Crebert et al. (2004) reported that %32 percent of participants reported that they experienced stress during undertaking practicum due to financial constraints. This phenomenon of stress resulting from practicum

placement is not unique to the Western context it is also a growing phenomenon in Saudi Arabia. It is reported that practicum meant and was a source of stress to placement or practicum students due to reasons of money and some other issues such as readiness and long hours of unpaid work (Alrashidi, 2022).

Further, financial constraints have deeper effects on the well-being of the students. It is reported that Students' financial circumstances and concerns about finances have the potential to impact their health and well-being as those who encounter financial difficulties may experience greater levels of stress and negative emotions which can impact their mental health (Heckman, Lim, & Montalto, 2014). Andrews and Chong (2011) also reported similar results, when they discussed practicum and anxiety. It is suggested that students who indicated they were struggling financially, or who reported having adequate finances, demonstrated more psychological distress, stress, anxiety, and depression than those who reported secure financial circumstances (Andrews & Chong, 2011). Moreover, it could be seen from the studies of Heckman et al. (2014) and Andrews and Chong (2011) that the financial hardships experienced by students were deeper during practicum than at any other time of the academic year. This is because practicum is usually full time and students can not usually do full-time paid work during practicum.

The financial hardships as reported by Heckman et al. (2014) and Andrews and Chong (2011) do not only occur as a result of everyday life expenses, but also because of the expenses of the practicum itself such as material, aids and other expenses. The situation in Saudi Arabia is not an exception. Even though the cost of placement, if there was any cost, is usually covered by the government, but not the expenses that emerge because of practicum or placement. It is a common practice for the to- be English teachers to cover the expenses that results from practicum. We are not only referring here to expenses of teaching aids, material, and transportation, but also items that teachers usually buy to motivate students such as candies and presents for high achievers. All those additional materials and things contribute to the hardships or financial hardship,s which are faced by practicum students not only in Saudi Arabia but the whole world as reported by Grant-Smith and Gillett-Swan (2017).

3.6 Role of Practicum in the Training of Teachers

Many studies discussed and have been discussing the role of practicum in the training of teachers from every angle in different contexts. However, it has been noticed that there is a gap in the studies that discuss the issue of pre-service EFL teachers' self-efficacy beliefs in their teaching practicum. Self-efficacy here refers to the extent to which teachers feel confident to control events that affect them. In one of the few studies that discussed the issue of self-efficacy, the impact of practicum on pre-service EFL teachers' self-efficacy beliefs before and after their practicum experience at school was discussed. Data was collected using the same 24-item teacher sense of efficacy (TSE) scale. Three null hypotheses were formulated based on the sub-categories of self-efficacy in the study: self-efficacy in student engagement, self-efficacy in applying instructional strategies, and self-efficacy in classroom management. The Wilcoxon-signed rank test runs on the pre-practicum and post-practicum results suggested that the null hypothesis that practicum would not bring about any change in

student engagement should be rejected. The second hypothesis, that there would be no significant difference between pre-practicum and post-practicum self-efficacy in applying instructional strategies, should also be rejected. The last hypothesis, that pre-service EFL teachers' self-efficacy in classroom management changes due to practicum experience, should be rejected. The findings are discussed considering implications to the language teacher's education programs and the development of practicum experience. In summary, the findings of the study spoke highly of the importance of increasing courses of pedagogical nature so that teachers can be more prepared for practicum and in turn increase engagement and benefit (Eginli & Solhi, 2021). The same study indicated that practicum has great benefits to teachers' self-efficacy as significant difference has been noticed in the study between student-teacher concerns at the beginning and the end of teaching practice and by practice here we mean practicum (Eginli & Solhi, 2021).

In another study, that is of quantitative, non-experimental comparative nature. The long-term effects of the collaborative practicum model (specifically the "academy-class" model) on novice teachers was discussed. Nissim and Danial-Saad (2023) aimed to discern disparities in the professional self-efficacy of novice educators who underwent training within the collaborative practicum model as opposed to those who adhered to the conventional teaching model. This comparative analysis is based on three variables: perception of the teaching profession, professional self-efficacy, and socio-economic security. Furthermore, the study examines whether the collaborative model contributes to cultivating more favorable attitudes toward the teaching profession and a greater inclination to continue teaching for an extended period exceeding three years and this is how this study is different from the first one discussed above. However, before moving on the term collaborative practicum should be discussed and any confusion between it and the term practicum needs to be cleared. It is reported that in the collaborative practicum students undergo varied intensive experiences with high involvement in school life while receiving mediation and feedback from the pedagogical instructor and the mentoring teacher. The students gradually integrate into teaching work, beginning with observing, assisting and one-on-one teaching, up to full co-teaching with a coaching teacher. The traditional practicum differs in that students are assigned to schools for a practicum of one day (six hours) a week, accompanied by a pedagogical instructor (Nissim & Danial-Saad, 2023). However, it should be noted here that the differentiation between collaborative and traditional practicum is made here with the geographical context of study in mind. In Saudi Arabia for example, when it comes to EFL, there is only one type of practicum, which is discussed above. All in all, the collaborative and the traditional practicum refer in general to the same thing. The two types only differ in intensity.

Many interesting results came out of this study which was conducted by Nissim and Danial-Saad (2023). The research findings underscore a higher level of teaching efficacy, socio-economic security, and a more positive outlook among those who participated in the collaborative practicum and expressed their intent to persist in the teaching profession. The outcomes just listed express and articulate the importance of practicum in the training of the teachers and its role in the continuity of their career and the solidification of their

professional life.

Many topics have been discussed in this review. By looking at the trajectory of the topics, it could be seen that practicum was introduced to the field of education out of necessity. It is still strongly present in almost all the institutions that offer teachers' training. It has been proven that it influences the to-be teachers progress and professional career. Different resources in different contexts call and refer to practicum differently depending on the needs and policies of different institutions and countries. As also noted from the review students give practicum high significance and seek to indulge in such an experience.

3. Method

Under this section participants, the approach to the research and the main questions of the research will be discussed. This study revolves around practicum and teachers who were placed or took a practicum course as a part of their studies recently. As discussed in the review of this study all students who are going to be teachers must take practicum as a core part of their degree and the participants of this study are not an exception. Students not only have to take practicum for the purpose of fulfilling the requirements of their studies, but also to keep up with the accreditation requirements of the institution that offers the degree. These teachers will be asked to reflect on some open-ended questions that are of related to their practicum experiences as will be discussed below.

2.1 Participants of the Research

The study purposefully selected student who completed their teaching practicum, specializing in MA in TESOL program, and who were in their final year of study (Year 2) at the time of this study. Usually, after year two of their studies students proceeded to complete a master thesis in their field interest under the supervision of an academic staff of the English language Institute of King Abdulaziz University. The research population targeted in this study was heterogenous: male and female students within the MA in TESOL program who have completed and passed their practicum. The researcher intended to ask only 5 male and 5 female students, to participate in the research. The English Language Institute of King Abdulaziz University is diverse, enrolling students of various social classes, racial compositions, and home locations. The institution has adequately trained and qualified staff and administrators with world-class resources and infrastructure and a various staff and students: from high, middle, and low economic classes. Hence, the sample of participants varied in age, race, socio-economic class, and schools where they conducted their practicum. However, it should be noted here that students did not vary significantly when it comes to age. This means that we do not have senior or near retirement students in our cohort.

All the students in this study have passed the practicum part of their studies in real-life classrooms in different schools and institutions under the supervision of mentors from the university, specifically from the English Language Institute of King Abdulaziz University. After resolving and finalizing all the ethical approvals from the university and the English Language Institute, our subjects were invited to participate in the research and were made aware of what is needed of them and what is expected of them and the choice was left to

them to either participate or not to participate. All our subjects agreed to participate and continue with the research process.

2.2 Research Approach and Instrument of Research

The participants of this research will be asked to reflect on their experiences regarding the practicum course that they have recently taken. This reflection will be done by giving the students 5 themes to reflect on. Those themes are directly related to the experience of the students in the practicum course they have taken. Those five themes are:

- a) Teaching practice
- b) Planning and development
- c) Knowledge
- d) Class management
- e) Self-efficacy

A space will be left to the students to comment on each dimension or theme in an open-ended way. After students have completed reflecting on the 5 themes, descriptive content analysis of the reflection will be carried out and linked to the themes and the up-to-date research and trends regarding practicum. Participant quotes are presented in italics and identified by the level of study of the respondent. All respondent quotes are from full-time students unless otherwise indicated.

It has been stated above that students will be given five themes to reflect on. This will be carried out by distributing printed materials to the participants with the five themes mentioned within the questions. Under each theme there will be a space left for the participants to reflect on each them. The students will be given two hours to reflect on the themes in a stress-free environment. The researcher will be present to answer any questions that may arise from the part of the students and clarify any ambiguity regarding the process.

4. Discussion and Reflection

In this section, we will discuss the reflection of the participants on their experience in the practicum course they took in their MA in TESOL. The discussion will be divided into five parts. The first part will be about teaching practice. The second part of the discussion will be about planning and development in the context of the classroom. The third part will be about knowledge. The fourth part will be about class management and we will end up with the fifth part, which will be devoted to the discussion of self-efficacy. The discussion of each part will not be delivered directly. Each part will be preceded by a brief introduction on what is exactly meant by it. For example, the category of knowledge will be discussed in terms of what it means and then the reflections of the students will be presented and discussed. The same will be done with each theme until the discussion of the five themes have been exhausted.

4.1 Teaching Practice

Teaching practice means, the perception of participants of the practice during and after

practicum. In other words, how do participants see or have seen that field of teaching before and after practicum. Moreover, how practicum helped them in shaping ideas about the field and their future in the field is of relevance here.

It could be seen from the reflections of the participants, both males and females, that in general all of them have a positive feeling toward the field of teaching after practicum and that most of them plan to stay in the field and build a career in the field of teaching. In her reflection, Nihal stated that before practicum she felt uncertain when it comes to the field, but ambiguity was cleared, to a far extent, after practicum as could be seen in her quote:

“..... during my bachelor’s degree and during my master’s degree I have been instructed that teaching can be carried out in certain ways and that I must be aware of the many things when it comes to teaching, such as the level of the students, their background and psychological factors that may affect the level of the students. At times, I felt that we were taught things irrelevant topics to teaching and the idea of teaching became very distant. However, during practicum things became clear and I had the chance to focus on the application of knowledge and see things at work. Moreover, I was introduced to things that nobody could teach me in a class, such as the physical burden of being a teacher and how to hang out.”

It was also reported in the reflections that ambiguity was not only at the transitional phase of teachers from theory to practice, but also on the level of even thinking of continuing with teaching as a profession as could be seen from the quote of Hamaid:

“.... I felt that I knew everything, practicum was hard in terms of setting my mind and thinking that I am a teacher now. I was hesitant and, in the beginning, I could not see myself as a teacher doing this for years to come, but now I understand that all I need is some patience and understanding of some administrative procedures.”

In one of the reflections, which was delivered by Samia, she raised a concern that is of relevance to the teaching practice, however, the issue was irrelevant to the ambiguity issue and that is the issue of exclusion during practicum. Samia reported that: *“..... when it comes to tests as a teacher I was not invited to take part in any decision-making process of all types of writing tests. I was totally excluded from that process.”* However, it could be argued here that this exclusion was not based on the claim that the institution of which the participant took practicum did not trust her abilities, but it was because this is the policy of the institution, this is to say that the institution in which the participant took practicum has a specific committee that set up exams and deliver them to all classes to make sure that all students take the same exams and that assessing process and measurement process are conducted fairly and equally. The reason it is believed here that the case here is relevant to the policy and not trust, springs from the fact that this quote or issue was only raised by zaone participant. Similar issue could not be noticed from another participant or in any other reflection delivered by our participants.

It should be reported here that the issue of exclusion from the decision-making process is practiced widely in many English teaching institutions around the world. The Saudi institutions are not an exception. That is due to organizational purposes and in some cases to

accreditation reasons as reported by Alhoussawi and Anwar (2024). Further, it has been reported that the exclusion issue is not limited to the decision-making process, but also to other aspects and processes of teaching profession such as giving feedback to colleagues and some managerial procedures (Alhoussawi & Anwar, 2024).

Another issue that was noticed from the reflections of the students regarding the practice of teaching was the issue of competence. Participants of the research have reported that even though, on the theoretical level, they felt that they have gained enough skills to stand in front of students and deliver lessons at times in the classroom, they encountered instances of “lack of experience” at the beginning, which was eliminated during later stages of practicum as we can see in Salem’s quote:

“... in my first class as a teacher, I was prepared, the lesson about the present simple, however, I was shaking while writing on the board and I found myself in a situation of awkward silence many times. The second day, I contemplated on my experience and delivered the second lesson way better than the first day. I give credit on my advancement as a teacher to practicum and the hands-on experience it offered me.”

The issue of experience and hands-on experiences is reported many times in different resources. It has been reported that one of the best things that students reported about practicum was the chance it gave them to practice in real-life situations and the hands-on experiences (Grant-Smith et al., 2018).

As could be seen above from the discussion of the experiences our participants had when it comes to practicum in the theme of teaching practice, all of them reported or reflected on three main points. These three points are ambiguity, exclusion from the decision-making process and the issue of competence.

4.2 Planning and Development

The second theme that will be discussed here is the theme of planning and development. Some discussion into what is meant by planning and development is going to be presented before we proceed to the discussion of how students reflected regarding this theme and the points they raised in the reflection. Planning and development in this research refer to the planning and development of a career in the field of teaching. In other words, students were asked to reflect on what role(s), if any, practicum played when it comes to adopting and pursuing a career in the field of teaching. It could be seen from the reflections of the students that certain patterns emerged regarding the topics they discussed and reflected on.

The participants reflected on many points, however, one of the main evident points in almost all the reflections received from the students was the issue of ability and career development. Here the word “ability” was used, because it is the word that was used by the participants. It is of significance here that we explain what the participants meant by this term before we continue with the discussion. The understanding of this term, that the students used, was reached after a careful analysis of the students’ reflections. For example, by looking at Nabeel’s quote we can get a glimpse of what they mean by ability:

“... Am I going to be able to give it all and change things? Before practicum, I did not look at myself as a teacher. I acted and thought like a student. For me, I felt it was like a dead-end, I did not have the urge or the ability to continue.”

It could be understood from the quote above that this participant thought he was not competent enough to be a teacher. He was fearful that his abilities were not up to the challenge and there was no plan in his mind on what comes next. The student even doubted his ability to continue as a teacher. The same participant reported another interesting point regarding post-practicum in the following quote:

“Even after all of us took the practicum course, I could feel a sense of uncertainty. All our discussions were about jobs and applications and whether vacancies will open. Issue of adapting to the new life and the promotions also occupied a lot of our discussion time.”

The issue of uncertainty in the transitional phase between practicum and the phase of actually being a teacher is not peculiar to the Saudi context. It is suggested that students, in the phase of pre-service, need great help to clear things out in the transitional phase. What happens is only support on the theoretical level, which students do not need much of at the level they have reached in their studies (Grant-Smith et al., 2018). The claim that was made by Grant-Smith et al. (2018) describes a quote that was delivered by one of the participants, Nabeel who stated:

“I have tried to contact my supervisor at the college many times to inquire about some administrative issues I was facing. I could not get in contact with him for a very long time. After he had replied to my emails, he only replied generally and in referred to the previous courses I have taken. I had to go outside the school I was placed in and outside the college in which I studied to the Department of Education in my city to get some answers. It was exhaustive and time-consuming.”

It could be seen from the discussion above that in relation to planning and development students or participants had mixed views. However, in general, there is to, a far extent, an agreement that practicum can help when it comes to giving a glimpse of the field or the profession of teaching, but the system of practicum does not provide enough support or experience in terms of the transitional phase between post -practicum and the professional life of teaching.

4.3 Knowledge

We mean by knowledge here, the knowledge application or, in other words, the role practicum plays in closing the gap between theory and practice (Farrell, 2007). We asked the participants to reflect on this point from every angle possible. For example, some students reflected on this point in terms of assessment. Other students reflected on this point in terms of the four skills application (reading, writing, listening, and speaking). Another group of participants reflected on this point in terms of producing teaching aids and tools.

One of the interesting reflections regarding this theme was a reflection delivered by Hana. Her reflection was about methods of teaching. In her quote, she argued:

“.... during our first year of study, we were introduced to many methods of teaching, especially methods related to teaching English. I was able to observe and peer-review one of my classmates before practicum and I gave her many points to develop further. However, during practicum, even though I planned my lesson carefully, I struggled with the lesson as I could not settle with one method and continue with it. I kept losing the attention of the students and they kept on asking questions that took everything out of order. What I learned in practicum was that you need to be prepared, but be flexible and ready with different scenarios.”

It could be argued here that what happened with the student or participant above is normal and can happen to even experienced teachers. It is suggested that at the beginning of the actual classroom teaching journey, the pre-service EFL teachers experienced weakness in their self-confidence and lack of knowledge in managing a real class (Eginli & Solhi, 2021).

The issue of assessment is another area that the participant reflected on. We can see from the quote of Nabeel that even though assessment methods are clear and taught in core courses where he studied, he still could not settle with a method of assessment he would follow with his students:

“..... the students asked me about the exam and I gave them some points and hints about the exam. However, they asked me specifically to give them multiple-choice questions as they were familiar with this type of assessment. That night I struggled with writing down questions as some skills could not be assessed using multiple-choice questions. They usually do not teach us at the university what to do in these situations. I managed to administer the exam. The students performed very well, but I learned not to give promises or corner myself and regret it later.”

From the reflection above it could be seen that practicum provided the student with some experience in the department of assessment that is not usually available in books and resources, which suggests that practicum can play a role in closing the gap between theory and practice.

Another interesting issue, which was raised by the participants, was the issue of teaching aids. Students usually attend two or three courses during their studies related to producing teaching aids. These courses focus on giving the students the ability to use aids and technology in the process of teaching. Our participants argue that it is of great importance to use these materials in the classroom and they go in parallel with using the right method and book in the classroom. However, our participants found it very difficult to use teaching aids during practicum the way they were taught due to some factors as could be seen in the quote of Salem:

“I tried to let my students learn by looking and touching. The school did not give us any authentic tools, but I used toys like snake- and- ladder and cubes. Also, I bought cartoon-papers and handed them out to the students to make wall panels. This made my students feel independent and I could apply what I learned at the university.”

Even though this issue is related to the application of knowledge we still can see that it is also

related to how students in general and our participants in particular perceive practicum. It is argued that students of post and pre-practicum and pre-service teachers have different perceptions of how practicum should look like and how it should go (Beck & Kosnik, 2002). Further, different students of post and pre practicum and pre service teachers have different perceptions in regard to their responsibilities and how involved they should be with the students and the different tasks of practicum (Simons et al., 2012). We discussed this point under the theme of knowledge because students usually get taught that they are not responsible for bringing and buying teaching aids and we could see that perception clearly in the quote of Salem presented above.

4.4 Class Management

Under this theme, we will discuss how the participants reflected on the theme of class management. However, before we deliver the discussion, we will discuss the meaning of class management. We mean by classroom management, the ability of the teacher to control the class in terms of instruction, communication, discipline, timing, or activity organization. These activities are the usual activities that any teacher encounters in any given day or class of his or her career as suggested by Dicke, Elling, Schmeck, and Leutner (2015). Normally, classroom management has two purposes. The first purpose is to establish a quiet and calm environment in the classroom so that the students can participate in meaningful learning of a topic, subject or a course. The second purpose of classroom management is to develop the students academically and socially (Postholm, 2013). It is suggested that classroom management contributes to the pupils' social and moral development (Postholm, 2013). Further, studies indicate that students in classes where the teacher has good control of the class and also shows care for the pupils have higher cognitive achievements and more positive attitudes to the subjects than students who do not have such teachers in their classes (Postholm, 2013).

Depending on the discussion above we asked our participants to reflect on their experience in practicum when it comes to classroom management with the discussion above in mind.

It is reported that the issue of classroom management during practicum is one of the main concerns of the students or to-be teachers (Postholm, 2013). The students of practicum in the Saudi context did not report differently as we can see from the quote of Hadeel:

“Nothing prepared to us a real class but practicum. They usually do not teach you how to handle a bully in the class, you have to do it on your own. Practicum gave me a taste of what to expect and how to spot troublemakers. I spent my practicum in a middle school, where students have a reputation for being difficult as they are usually in their first teen years. What worried me the most was my inability to report the difficulties I was facing with difficult students to my supervisor as I did not want to look incompetent.”

Even though the issue of keeping the class calm was the most reported issue in the reflections of the participants, there is another issue that was reported in relation to classroom management, which is the issue of time management in the classroom. Ohoud. M quote reports on this issue clearly:

“..... during the lessons students could not differentiate between instructions and exercises. Every time I stop to give students some exercises I do it in a way that is wordy and not understood by the students. I should have paced myself and remained calm so that more time was given for each component separately.”

Another very important issue that our participants reflected on was the issue of improvement of behavior. Hadeel reported on the issue of behavior improvement and wrote:

“I am a teacher now, even though my degree is not conferred yet, I have to act like a teacher, I am behind the canon now and I have to act professionally. I realized that when I saw the faces of my students, who were close to me in age. I took practicum in a technical college close to where I lived. Practicum, without a doubt, was the reason I made this distinction between my life as a student and my professional life as a teacher.”

Our participants also reflected on another significant issue, which is the issue of disciplining the students or as they referred to it the Implementation of reactive punishments in the classroom. Reactive punishment is a theory that revolves around offering types of punishments to unruly students that are appropriate to their age and context and do not harm the students physically (Alasmari & Althaqafi, 2021).

The application of such strategies needs to be practiced before they are applied on a larger context as could be seen in the quote of Hadeel:

“I took my practicum in a secondary school. The age of the students was closer to mine. So, I had to be careful when disciplining the students. I talked to an experienced teacher in the school about this issue and she advised me to use long eye contact with the students while talking to signal that there is something that needs to be fixed. I tried it and it worked.”

It could be seen from the discussion above that practicum has positive effects on the teachers' skills when it comes to class management techniques. In all the quotes we presented and discussed above practicum was mentioned as a pivotal factor in the progress of the students and education management.

4.5 Practicum and Self-Efficacy

The body of research that is available on the topic of self-efficacy in relation to practicum is vast. However, when it comes to the Saudi context the topic of self-efficacy needs more attention as the research in this area is almost absent. Our participants were asked to reflect on the self-efficacy and practicum with a definition of self-efficacy in mind. This paper defines self-efficacy in terms of teachers' personal beliefs in their abilities to help students learn, influencing their activities, effort, and persistence in the classroom (Hussain, Khan, & Bidar, 2022).

It could be noticed that the topic of self-efficacy is of great importance to our participants and that they usually discuss it with their practicum supervisors for many reasons. One of the main reasons is continuity and perseverance. It could not be seen as surprising that our participants chose to reflect on continuity and perseverance when it comes to practicum and self-efficacy as from a quick look at the available literature on the topic, we can see that it has

been discussed in depth in different context by different teachers of all backgrounds. For example, it could be seen from Hadeel's quote how important practicum was for her in terms of self-efficacy:

"I could not cope in the beginning. Everything was different. I had the knowledge, but I felt that I lack practical knowledge and had inadequate classroom management skills. I faced some emotional challenges with no support at all. My only support was the concept of practicum as a whole. I kept on going and things started to fall in place one after another."

Sumaya also reflected on the same issue, however, from a slightly different perspective:

"I did not see myself as a teacher at the very beginning. I was studying until I found myself taking a practicum. I did not know what the future held for me. Am I going to be a teacher who changes lives and loves what she does? I was considering other options until I took a practicum. Now, I can see myself continuing in this profession and developing personally at the same time, because I know now what to do exactly and what to expect."

It could be seen from Sumaya's quote that she felt confident after taking practicum and that she feels confident now. She sees herself as a teacher and wants to preserve as a teacher. This suggests that practicum can play a positive role in relation to self-efficacy.

5. Conclusion

It could be seen from the reflections of the participants, both males and females, that in general all of them have positive feelings toward the field of teaching after practicum and that most of them plan to build a career in the field of teaching. In relation to planning and development students or participants had mixed views. However, in general there is to, a far extent, an agreement that practicum can help when it comes to giving a glimpse of the field or the profession of teaching, but the system of practicum does not provide enough support or experience in terms of the transitional phase between post -practicum and the professional life of teaching. The participants asserted that practicum has a positive significant effect on class management techniques and the same assertion was made on the theme of self-efficacy. However, further studies are needed regarding some themes, especially self-efficacy in the Saudi context.

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