

Eötvös Loránd University

Faculty of Education and Psychology

Doctoral School of Education

Head of the Doctoral School: Dr. Anikó Zsolnai

Ei Phyu Chaw

Practicum in Preservice Teacher Education in Myanmar

Doctoral (PhD) dissertation

Thesis Supervisor

Dr. habil. Erika Kopp

2023

Introduction

Teachers have to undertake complex tasks and learn, such as planning the lesson for the students, presenting the lesson in the classroom, working collaboratively with other teachers, analyzing their practice, and considering different approaches to learning (Mattsson et al., 2011). Thus, the challenge of preparing teachers for the profession is also complex and intricate. It is not easy to make decisions about the content structure, arrangement, course materials, the school experience, the preparation of students, working with the personnel, and the school's expectations.

Initial teacher preparation can be viewed from the complex system perspective as it involves the interactions of different actors such as policy makers, teacher educators, teachers, student teachers and things needed for accreditation and professional standards (OECD, 2019a). The modern framework for teacher education incorporates both initial teacher training and ongoing professional development. In this current study, preservice/initial teacher education means the undergraduate teacher training offered at Universities of Education and Education Degree Colleges.

Linking theory and practice poses a significant challenge for initial teacher education. Upon examining initial teacher preparation in OECD member countries, with a specific focus on Korea and Wales, it was frequently reported that these nations encountered difficulties in integrating theory and practice in their programs. Additionally, insufficient training was provided to address the specific challenges of career jolt and work burden in Japan and the Netherlands (OECD, 2019b).

Similarly, there are still many challenges in teacher education in Myanmar though it started its reforms in 2011. Practicum in initial teacher education programs in Myanmar is still needed to be developed with the practice support systems (NESP, 2016). Besides, more supervision, feedback, or guidance must be needed during practicum. The university/college-based teacher training program has been criticized for the far distance of the theoretical content of the curriculum, teaching methods, and current practices in the classroom. Teacher education at Education Degree College needs to include more classroom-based hands-on experience as an essential component of the training program (Lall, 2021).

As a teacher educator, and researcher, I plan to highlight the actual problems of implementing the curriculum to fill the gap between theoretically based university coursework and real situations in the classroom. The outdated curriculum and teaching methods, inadequate infrastructure, unattractive salary, and working conditions make the barrier to making a living as a teacher in Myanmar. During the lecture time at the university, student teachers complained

about the unmotivating current curriculum, teaching methods and exam system. While addressing these complaints and acknowledging the complexity of the teacher education system and the various contextual factors that influence on it, I am interested in delving into a potential solution to address the issues within university-based teacher education programs. I assume that the practicum period is the only thing that bridges university-based teacher education programs and the actual situation in schools. Therefore, the foundation of this study is grounded in my research passion and fundamental beliefs, driving me to explore the implementation of practicum within the context of teacher education programs offered by universities and colleges.

Livingston and Flores (2017) compared research related to teacher education for four decades and criticized that most studies emphasize the perceptions of preservice teachers on the practicum. Many studies include the views of beginning teachers in their transition period. Less systematic research methods include personal memories, documentation, narratives, and visual methods. They suggested that it is necessary to develop more extensive studies with more significant samples using mixed-method approaches. In addition, few studies include different stakeholders in teacher education.

Research on teacher learning and practical application of teaching in teacher education is necessary to demonstrate the qualities of the program related to intended outcomes and to give helpful information to practitioners and policymakers (Zeichner, 2006). Most of the practicum research focused on the practicum's importance, the partition of theory and practice, and the collaboration of cooperating teachers during the practicum. However, many scholars highlight practicum as a crucial component of teacher education programs. Only a few publications in Myanmar address the practicum and programs in teacher education in terms of their actors and features using a mixed-method approach. Based on the theory practice challenge, the literature gap and the methodology demand, this current study of practicum within university/college teacher education program is intended to conduct in Myanmar setting.

The aim of the study

This study aims to undertake an in-depth investigation of the implementation of the practicum within initial teacher education programs in Myanmar. It seeks to examine the various conditions, objectives, and approaches employed to enhance the quality of both the practicum and the overall program. Additionally, the study aims to investigate the practicum implementation by analyzing relevant policy documents and exploring the perspectives of different actors, including student teachers, novice teachers, and teacher educators. The study will delve into their unique experiences, challenges faced, coping strategies employed,

competency development and opinions on various aspects of the practicum, including mentoring/support systems and the university program. Furthermore, the study intends to develop a scale for assessing student teachers' common coping strategies to navigate the teaching-learning dynamics during the practicum period.

Theoretical underpinnings

This descriptive analysis of the practicum study uses ideas from complexity theory as a theoretical lens to guide the analysis of the implementation of the practicum system in a pre-service teacher education program. This study also drew on ideas from the ecosystem theory of Bronfenbrenner (1977) as the implementation of the practicum can be explored from the micro level perspective of individual student teachers' experiences, meso level perspective of student teachers and novice teachers at school, and macro level perspective of the teacher education university/college program and policies. Besides, experience-based learning theory of Dewey (1938) also assist to understand the learning process of student teachers and novice teachers from their teaching experience. The concept of social constructionism of Vonk (1989) supports to understand the socialization and adaptation process of the student teachers and novice teachers at the school setting. Social cognitive theory of Bandura (1986) helps to comprehend the learning and construction of their knowledge based on their experience and socialization process of student teachers and novice teachers during the early period of teaching and the coping theory of Folkman and Lazarus (1988) supports to analyze the coping strategies of student teachers and novice teachers related to teaching learning situation during their early period of teaching. Based on the theories, the researcher tries to conceptualize and interpret the implementation of practicum from the perspectives of student teachers, novice teachers, and teacher educators in the areas of difficulties, coping strategies, mentoring, practicum period, university program, and competency achievement.

Research framework

The research paradigm for this doctoral study is positioned between interpretivism and pragmatism as it is aimed to explore participants' personal experiences and focuses on renewing practicum and consideration of policy for curriculum and program development. Interpretivism's point of view for this study can be assumed that the actions and actual experiences of student teachers, teacher educators from universities, and beginning teachers during the practicum are the real things to be researched to know about the practicum in teacher education. Subjective opinions, experiences, and perceptions of student teachers, teacher educators from universities, and beginning teachers are the knowledge that is assumed to be known. However, the research is focused on renewing practicum and consideration of policy

from the pragmatists' approach. The pragmatists' point of view for this study considers policy for curriculum and program development and understands the implementation of practicum by all actors, the aim, and the subjective nature of the environment.

Research design

This study used a mixed-method methodology and framed this between interpretivism and pragmatism. As a research design, an exploratory sequential mixed method design is used. The participants' group for this study includes student teachers, novice teachers, and teacher educators. For the qualitative strand of the study, snowball sampling is employed and in the quantitative part, cluster sampling and purposive random sampling were used. The criterion for choosing the participants is that those student teachers and novice teachers who had practicum (blog teaching or practice teaching) experience in their teacher education program and those teacher educators who had experiences in the arrangement or supporting role of the practicum.

Research Questions

The research questions are developed based on the aim and in accordance with the research design.

1. What are the main characteristics of practicum in preservice teacher education in Myanmar?	
1) How is the practicum framed (in terms of aim, structure, activities, mentoring, and evaluation) in teacher education policy documents in Myanmar?	(doc analysis)
2. How do the different actors perceive the practicum in teacher education in Myanmar?	
1) How do student teachers perceive the role of practicum?	(quali)
a) What are student teachers' perceptions of their activities during the practicum?	(quanti)
b) What are the difficulties that student teachers face during their practicum?	(quali+quanti)
c) How do student teachers cope with the challenges during their practicum?	
i. What are student teachers' preferred coping strategies for their daily lives?	(quanti)
ii. What are the student teachers' coping strategies related to the difficulties during their practicum?	(quanti)
iii. Which items should be included in developing the instrument to measure student teachers' common coping strategies related to the teaching-learning situation?	(quanti)
d) How do student teachers perceive the role of mentoring during practicum? (What are student teachers' perceptions of their activities during the practicum?)	(quali+quanti)
e) How do student teachers see university-based teacher education's preparation for their practicum? (What are student teachers' perceptions of their activities during the practicum?)	(quali+quanti)

f) What are the student teachers' perceptions of their competency development?	(quanti)
(2) How do novice teachers perceive their past practicum?	
a) What are novice teachers' general coping strategies for their daily lives?	(quanti)
b) What difficulties do novice teachers face during their first year of teaching?	(quali+quanti)
c) How do novice teachers use the knowledge and skills they got in past practicum to cope with the difficulties in first-year teaching? (What are novice teachers' coping strategies related to teaching-learning difficulties?)	(quali+quanti)
d) How do novice teachers perceive the role of mentoring? (What are novice teachers' perceptions on the mentoring or support system during their practicum?)	(quali+quanti)
e) How is the past practicum in university-based teacher education supported to the first-year teaching of novice teachers? (What are novice teachers' perceptions of the role of university-based teacher education?)	(quali+quanti)
f) What are the novice teachers' perceptions of their competency development?	(quali)
(3) How do university-based teacher educators perceive the changing role of the practicum?	
a) How do university-based teacher educators perceive the student teachers' practicum?	(quali)
b) How do university-based teacher educators perceive the support and evaluation of student teachers during the practicum?	(quali)
c) What are university-based teacher educators' opinions on better practicum and program?	(quali)

Data collection and analysis method

The pandemic and political situation make getting information for the entire population of student teachers and novice teachers difficult. The main criterion for choosing the participant is focused on those who had the practicum experience (two times) in teacher education program. The total number of participants in the quantitative portion of this study includes student teachers (N=328) from the University of Education and Education colleges, novice teachers (N=46) from Basic Education schools in different geographical areas. The participants in qualitative part consist of student teachers (N=12), novice teachers (N=8) and teacher educators (N=4). As the data collection method, focus group interviews, photo interviews, document collection (N=19), and questionnaires are used. As for the data analysis methods, the deductive approach to conduct document analysis and thematic analysis (inductive coding approach) was conducted to analyze photo interview data and focus group data for the qualitative part. SPSS software was used to conduct the descriptive and inferential analysis

methods, including M, SD, frequency, multiple response analysis, exploratory factor analysis, t-test, Chi-square analysis, and ANOVA tests.

Results

Document analysis

The results of the document analysis of practicum related documents (N=19), it was found that 72 codes were matched with the template: 7 codes related to the aim/definition of the practicum, 38 codes related to the structure of the practicum, 7 codes matched with student teachers' activities related to the practicum, 5 codes for mentoring/supporting system, and 17 codes in relation with the evaluation of the practicum. It can be reported that practicum in preservice teacher education is **aimed** at student teachers: to equip them with pedagogical skills, to have the opportunity to practice their teaching in a real and controlled environment, and to acquire practicum teacher competencies standards. The **practicum structure** is administered from the host university/college with the approval of the Ministry of Education and the cooperation of school principals and township education officers.

The **practicum component** comprises lesson planning, lesson study, peer group teaching, portfolio, school visits, and placement. The **practicum period** for student teachers under the university arrangement took 4 weeks for the first time in their third year and 2 weeks for the second time in their fourth year of the study program. For student teachers in Education Degree College (old system), the practicum period took 6 weeks at the end of their first year and 6 weeks at the end of the second year of their diploma program.

During the practicum, **student teachers must prepare** lesson plans, teaching aids, daily diaries, and lesson observation and practice teaching in the classroom. **Evaluation criteria** were handed to the practising school with student teachers. The principals, and cooperating teachers are supposed to evaluate the student teachers according to the criteria. **Mentoring or supporting system** of student teachers during their program has not been described in the practicum related documents.

Photo-elicitation interview results with student teachers (N=12)

Photos (N=9) including drawing graph and cartoon picture are employed to explore student teachers' experiences during the practicum and opinions on university program. The photo-elicitation interview results were presented according to seven themes: (i) memory related to the photos, (ii) experiences and feeling during their practicum, (iii) teaching experience, (iv) misbehaviour and coping, (v) teaching difficulties and coping, (vi) mentoring/getting support (vii) university/college program.

The results of photo-elicitation interview with student teachers can be summarized that **the first week** of the school practicum period was challenging for student teachers as it was their first practice teaching time in real classrooms. They were **excited, anxious, stressed, and tired** in the early days of practicum. **In later weeks**, student teachers could manage inconvenient things and became happy and enjoyed their teaching. Student teachers **tried to include group work activities** during their lessons. Some student teachers created teaching aids with their colleagues at school.

Student teachers **faced problems making the group, allocating insufficient teaching aids, and managing students' misbehavior**. Student teachers encountered students chatting, and some students were not interested in their lessons. Besides, some students did not give respect student teachers.

Student teachers **created teaching aids by themselves** and used available material to explain the lesson. Student teachers used **their facial expressions, scolding, threatening, and asking questions to students to cope with student misbehavior problems**. Student teachers sometimes asked the principal and other teachers if they had difficulties.

For **mentoring or support system**, student teachers expressed that it would be better for them if someone would guide and support them when they needed help. However, student teachers (N=12) got informal support from schoolteachers regarding subject matter, teaching methods, and classroom management.

Student teachers highlighted that **the university program** helped with the practicum. However, there needed to be more curriculum content in universities and practice in schools. Some university subjects helped them. They needed more effective and practical teaching methods. Nevertheless, they wanted university educators to observe and evaluate their teaching during their practicum.

Student teachers' (N=328) responses to questionnaire 1

Student teachers were asked to describe their practices and perceptions related to (i) practicum period (ii) difficulties related to teaching, student misbehavior, other difficulties, (iii) general coping strategies (iv) coping strategies related to those difficulties, (v) common coping strategies, (vi) their perceptions of mentoring (vii) university program, and (viii) competency development. The items were developed based on the literature and photo-elicitation interview results.

Among the ten items related to **the practicum period**, student teachers agreed that the practicum period was important for gaining classroom experience (M=4.21, SD=.63), and they

had the opportunity to learn how to prepare and teach a lesson appropriate to the student ($M=4.18$, $SD=.58$).

Among the **difficulties related to teaching**, the most significant proportion of 49.8% of student teachers ($N=163$) selected “insufficient teaching aids”, 43.4% of student teachers ($N=142$) chose “teaching slow learners”, 29.4% of student teachers ($N=96$) picked up “uninterested students in the lesson,”. Regarding **student misbehavior problems**, 45% of student teachers ($N=147$) chose “inactive students in group work”; about 32.1% of participants ($N=105$) selected “students’ chatting while I am teaching”, and about 25.1% of student teachers selected ($N=82$) picked difficulty 4 “managing disobedient students”. Among **other difficulties**, about 43.1% of student teachers ($N=141$) selected “managing stress,” 26.6% of participants ($N=87$) picked “writing practicum journal,” and 23.2% of student teachers ($N=76$) faced “poor working conditions of the school.”

A Chi-Square Goodness of Fit Test was performed to determine **whether the proportion of student teachers who faced difficulties differed between three different school locations** (rural, urban, and suburban) in 1st practicum. The **proportions significantly differed** by time management problems, [$\chi^2(2) = 9.97$, $p = .007$]; teaching with a learner-centered approach, [$\chi^2(2) = 18.87$, $p = .000$]; unable to use different teaching methods effectively in the real classroom, [$\chi^2(2) = 7.95$, $p = .019$]; inability to manage group activities, [$\chi^2(2) = 12.21$, $p = .002$]; large class size, [$\chi^2(2) = 14.26$, $p = .000$]; insufficient time to prepare lessons and teach, [$\chi^2(2) = 12.43$, $p = .002$], difficulty in lesson preparation, [$\chi^2(2) = 10.92$, $p = .004$] and managing disobedient students, [$\chi^2(2) = 7.15$, $p = .028$] respectively.

Among the three school locations (rural, urban, and suburban), the proportion of **student-teachers in rural schools** mainly had encountered “students are not interested in the lesson” ($N=52$), “teaching some lessons” ($N=45$), “large class size” ($N=44$) and “inactive student during group activities” ($N=99$). Meanwhile, **student-teachers in urban schools** mostly faced “inability to manage students’ group activities” ($N=11$) and “difficulty in lesson preparation” ($N=9$) compared to student-teachers in rural schools and suburban schools during their 1st practicum.

Most student teachers ($N=189$) preferred seeking social support coping strategies among the four **general coping strategies**.

According to the results of multiple response analysis, student teachers ($N=184$) mostly used “consult with an experienced teacher” for **coping the problem** of “teaching slow learners”, student teachers ($N=69$) used “create teaching aids by themselves” to cope with “lack of/inadequate support of teaching aids problems”, and student teachers ($N=39$) selected “giving

motivation to the student,” to solve the difficulty of “students are not interested in the lesson.” Regarding coping with student misbehavior problems, about 25.5% of student teachers (N=82) used “going closer to those students and asking questions” to solve the problem of “Inactive student during group activities,” 14% of student teachers (N=45) employed “teaching students to be obedient” to cope with “managing disobedient students,” and 17.4% of participants (N=56) applied “asking questions to students who are talking to each other during the lesson” to solve the problem of “chatting with their friends during the lesson.”

The results of **exploratory factor analysis** revealed six factors related to student teachers' common **coping strategies scale**. The common coping strategies scale consists of problem-solving by self, avoidance, giving punishment, adaptation to the situation, seeking professional support, and getting emotional support.

Related to **mentoring/supporting system**, student teachers (N=382) agreed that they needed guidance from the school principal and subject leader. Student teachers think that less experienced teachers need mentoring from a more experienced instructor. Participants rated "the school principal does not visit and provide guidance" as the highest (M=4.18, SD=.59), followed by "No guidance provided by subject leader" (M= 4.16, SD=.59).

Among the 12 items related to the **university program** representing the teaching methods and content, student teachers rated the item of “prior to the time of practicum, students-teachers are grouped at the University of Education/Degree College to develop teaching aids and conduct peer group teaching” (M=4.26, SD=.69) as the highest. Student teachers agreed that the courses they learned in a university/ college program are more theoretical than practical.

Student-teachers perceived that they learned and developed **their competencies** from both the university program and the practicum period. However, for competency 4, which involves understanding and using different assessment forms to guide and support learning, the student-teachers (67.5%) perceived that they primarily learned this skill from the university program. On the other hand, for competency 11, which involves choosing and using various classroom management techniques in managing teaching and learning processes, the student-teachers (65.6%) believed that they primarily learned this skill from their university program.

Focus group interview with novice teachers (N=8)

From the focused group interview with novice teachers, it can be known that novice teachers were burdened with administrative work such as typing, recording meeting notes, and examination duties. Concerning **professional activities**, novice teachers had to teach overtime

after school hours and took subject leader roles. Related to the practicum, novice teachers said the practicum period is short.

Novice teachers faced **behavioural problems** among the students, language difficulties with teaching students who spoke one ethnic language, problems with competition between teachers, and teaching with diverse needs of students. Novice teachers reported that their school principals and other teachers do not like their new teaching methods, such as group work and activities. Novice teachers **learned from the guided book and the internet** and attended workshops and refresher courses for different subjects. They learned from social media to create teaching aids. They **approached their parents, other teachers, and friends** to discuss their problems and **got their suggestions**.

Some novice teachers asked for help from their friends and the school principal. Novice teachers **get support from their colleagues and senior teachers** in preparing the lesson and writing lesson plans. Even though there is **no formal mentoring and induction program in Myanmar** teacher education program, novice teachers can adapt to the situation of the schools and receive help from experienced teachers and friends to solve their personal and professional problems.

Novice teachers felt that teaching methods, problem-solving, discussion, and lesson planning in their undergraduate **university program** are ineffective in the actual classroom situation. Novice teachers suggested that the curriculum in the university program should integrate real situations in the school, adding more practical lessons and practicum time to the program.

Results of Novice teachers' responses to Questionnaire 2 (N=46)

This questionnaire for novice teachers was intended to examine the novice teachers' perceptions of the past practicum and university program. The questionnaire was composed of demographic information, (i) perception on practicum (ii) difficulties related to the teaching-learning situation and coping strategies, (iii) general coping strategies (iv) perceptions on mentoring/ getting support, (v) program, and (vi) perceived competency development.

Regarding to the **practicum period**, novice teachers agreed that “they had micro-teaching and peer group teaching practice at the university/college and during the practicum period” ($M=4.41$, $SD=.49$) and “it will be better if the curriculum content of the university/college is integrated into the practical lesson” ($M=4.41$, $SD=.54$) as these items had the highest mean values among 13 items under practicum scale.

Among the **difficulties related to teaching-learning situation**, the largest proportion of 47.8% of novice teachers ($N=22$) selected “difficulties in teaching slow learners.” About

37% of novice teachers (N=17) chose “managing disobedient students,” and about 34.8% of novice teachers (N=16) chose “inconvenient with teaching student-centered approach.” The results of multiple response analysis for general coping strategies indicated that 45.3% of novice teachers (N=24) chose seeking social support as their general coping strategy.

Novice teachers (N=9) chose “discuss with an experienced teacher” to **solve the difficulty** of teaching slow learners. Other novice teachers (N=7) used “meeting and discussing with parents” to cope with managing disobedient student problems, and about five novice teachers picked up “learning from the internet” to cope with the problem of inconvenience by using a student-centered approach.

Descriptive analysis results the participants’ **perceptions of mentoring/** getting the support they received during their early teaching period. Participants rated getting suggestions from a friend as the highest (M=4.00, SD= .73), but participants disagreed the fact that they did not receive any help or guidance from the principal (M=3.91, SD=.59).

Related to participants’ **perceptions of their university/ college program**, it was found that participants rated “it would be better if teacher educators from university integrate the teaching method with actual lessons” (M=4.26, SD=.64) as the highest, and “cannot use student-centered approach because of time and space limitations and large class size” as the lowest with a mean value of (M=3.48, SD=1.04).

Novice teachers tend to consider university programs as the primary source for **developing their competencies**, except for competencies 2, 9, 10, and 13. More specifically, for competency 2, participants (59.1%) believed that the practicum provided them with the opportunity to learn how to select and adapt different teaching methods based on the characteristics of the learners they were working with. For competency 9, participants (75%) perceived that the practicum allowed them to engage in learning activities either individually or collaboratively with other teachers. For competency 10, participants (63.6%) felt that they could develop their personal teaching practice by learning from other experienced teachers and by engaging in professional development opportunities during their practicum. Finally, for competency 13, participants (86.4%) believed that the practicum provided them with the opportunity to reflect on their own teaching practice, which is crucial for improving their teaching skills.

Participatory interview with teacher educators (N=4)

The participatory interview with teacher educators (N=4) can be summarized into that teacher educators assumed that the practicum period was necessary for student teachers to learn from their teaching practice and apply their knowledge in the classroom. Teacher educators

believe **that student teachers need to make more effort** to prepare themselves for future challenges. Teacher educators see student teachers' difficulties in their practicum diaries, and they are trying to reduce student teachers' difficulties year after year from the university site.

Teacher educators assumed that student teachers needed **support** during their practicum. Teacher educators could only support or supervise student teachers for part of the practicum period as they had teaching tasks for other students. During the practicum, the principal or subject dean is supposed to **evaluate** student teachers according to the evaluation criteria of the evaluation form. Teacher educators from the university or Education degree college could not visit student teachers in the practicing schools occasionally because of other teaching tasks.

Teacher educators consider that **the practicum period** will be more successful if there is an extended time for the bloc teaching period, student teachers prepare themselves well, the principal and teachers from the respective school and the teacher educators from the University supervise and support student teachers during their practicum. Teacher educators highlighted that the new curriculum/program at the Education Degree College is good. However, they still need human resources, further training, and face-to-face discussion about implementing the new curriculum. For a better university program, **the university program needs infrastructure support** from the Ministry of Education or the government to update new things in the teacher education curriculum and program.

Conclusion

This study aims to explore the implementation of practicum in Initial teacher education to improve the practicum and program of teacher education in Myanmar. Two main research questions and sub-questions are developed based on the aim of the study, and an exploratory sequential mixed method design is used to answer the questions. The data collection method includes document analysis, photo-elicitation interviews, focus group interviews, participatory interviews, and questionnaires. The sample in this study includes documents (n=19), student teachers (N=340), novice teachers (N=54), and teacher educators (N=4). The data analysis method includes thematic and deductive analysis using MAXQDA and descriptive and inferential analysis using SPSS software.

According to the document analysis results of the practicum-related documents from the university and teacher education college, the characteristics of the practicum can be overviewed with the structure, aim, and evaluation of the practicum. Related to the **practicum structure**, student teachers in the undergraduate teacher education program (5-yrs) are required to complete practicum I in 3rd year (at the end of the 6th semester) for four weeks. Student

teachers must participate in Practicum II of the university program in the 4th year (the middle of the 8th semester) for two weeks. Meanwhile, student teachers from the Education College diploma program (2 yrs, old system) have to undertake Practicum I at the end of 1st year (6 weeks) and Practicum II at the end of 2nd year (6 weeks) for their practice teaching.

There seem to be no modifications from the teacher education program at the university. All the actors (student teachers, novice teachers and teacher educators) remarked that the practicum period needs to be longer. Compared to EDC, **practicum period** in UoE is shorter. Compared to international practicum in China, Iran, Ethiopia and Kazakhstan, practicum period in teacher education in Myanmar is shorter. It has been highlighted in the work of Cohen (2013) that student teachers reported needing more time to understand the context. As Darling-Hammond (2014) suggested, the high-powered program needs student teachers to invest ample time in their university program and a full academic year of student teaching period under the supervision of experts to grow roots from their practice.

The practicum in teacher education in Myanmar is **aimed** at student teachers to equip them with pedagogical skills, to have the opportunity to practice their teaching in a real and controlled environment and to acquire practicum teacher competencies standards. Based on the study results, the practicum's aim is partly accomplished in giving the opportunity to have pedagogical experiences and acquiring competency standards for student teachers in the real environment. This finding is echoed by the review of Cohen and others (2013); most of the practicums' goals were related to the preservice teachers' professional growth and better acquaintance with the teacher's actual role, the school's environment, and its students' cultural diversity.

The practicum-related document highlighted that teacher educators, principals, and schoolteachers are expected to supervise the student teachers. Though school principals and teachers are supposed to **evaluate or supervise** student teachers, they are busy with other school administrative tasks. They needed to learn their roles and duties and clarification of evaluating and supervising student teachers during their practicum. They still need to receive training about evaluating the student teachers' performance during their practicum period. Teacher educators could visit one or two times to student teachers' practicum and meet with the principal. Teacher educators needed more time to observe student teachers' performance because of other teaching and administrative tasks.

In that case, teacher educators noted that some principals need clarification about their supervision roles and the evaluation form. It seems that the role and duties of supervision and evaluation of the practicum are not clarified and identified between the actors for the practicum.

Thus, the supervision and evaluation of the student teachers' performance in the school environment still needed to be developed further. As Darling-Hammond (2014) suggested, the high-powered program needs student teachers to invest ample time in their university program and a full academic year of student teaching period under the supervision of experts to grow roots from their practice.

In the area of **mentoring or support**, some challenging points are found. Student teachers needed adequate guidance on planning the lessons, using teaching methods accordingly, and managing student misbehaviour problems during their practicum. Student teachers need actionable feedback on their teaching. Teacher educators thought they had already helped student teachers prepare for the practicum, and they had no idea about supporting them during the practicum period. Thus, teacher educators needed precise tasks and duties for mentoring or supporting student teachers during the practicum period. They needed the training to mentor, supervise or evaluate student teachers during their practicum. Principals and teachers in practising schools require adequate knowledge and training about mentoring or supporting student teachers during their practicum period. However, student teachers got informal support from the principals, schoolteachers, their friends, and their families. In that case, the quality of the mentoring or support must be maintained. Agudo (2016) said mentoring is vital to all teacher education programs. McCollum (2014) also recommended effective mentoring programs for supporting beginning teachers to interact with others who understand their situation and can support them in difficult situations. Myanmar National Education Strategic Plan (2016-2021) report also highlighted that supporting systems and supervision in teacher education still need to be stronger.

In general, all the actors have **positive perspectives on the practicum period**. Student teachers recognized that the practicum period is essential for getting classroom experience and the opportunity to learn how to teach the students. Similar results can be found in the work of (Koşar & Bedir, 2019); the preservice teachers stated that practicum allowed them to put their theoretical knowledge into practice. Novice teachers agreed they got good teaching practice experience and felt more confident after the practicum period. Student teachers and novice teachers can learn more about the student, school environment, curriculum, teaching methods, and the relationship between the stakeholders if they have a more extended practicum period. Teacher educators perceived that the practicum period is essential for student teachers to integrate their theoretical knowledge and practice.

Student teachers faced **problems related to teaching-learning situations during practicum**. The problems include teaching difficulties such as insufficient teaching aids, large

class size, teaching methods, and subject difficulties; difficulties in managing student misbehaviour such as talkative students, unrespectful behaviour, and uninterested students in the lesson; and other difficulties such as being stressed, transportation problems, working conditions, building a relationship with students, parents, and other teachers. Novice teachers faced the same difficulties, such as students' behavioural problems, diverse backgrounds, late lessons behind monthly lesson plans, and communication problems with the principal, other teachers, and student's parents. The findings of Keser Ozmantar (2019) revealed similar results: most preservice teachers mentioned concerns about classroom management, unmotivated students who had no interest in the lesson, and inclusive students.

Besides, student teachers in this study faced the problem of using the student-centred approach. The current finding parallels the review by Cohen (2013); preservice teachers who were prepared to use constructivist approaches faced difficulty using that approach in their practicum. Novice teachers also encountered the problem of using a student-centred approach. Similar findings of Lall (2021) noted that the teachers in Myanmar struggled to apply the student-centred approach. Teacher educators assumed that student teachers must make more effort to prepare themselves for tentative challenges before the practicum. Compared to international research, these findings are similar with the difficulties faced by novice teachers of other studies (Veenman, 1984; Chaaban & Du, 2017; Gaikhorst et al., 2017; Çakmak et al., 2019). However, large class sizes, using student-centered approach and teaching according to the monthly curriculum because of exam system in schools are significant problems found in this study.

Student teachers and novice teachers used “seeking social support **coping strategy**” for their daily life problems. They mostly asked their friends, principals, and other experienced teachers. This finding aligns with the result of (Murray-Harvey et al., 2000) that teacher education students reported that their primary coping strategy was seeking support from the teacher in the practicum. Related to teaching-learning problems, they used individual coping strategies based on the situation. Coping strategies are individualized, but student teachers can get support and learn from their friends, experienced teachers, principals, and teacher educators. The relationship between individual problems and coping strategies encountered at their practicum or schools under the guidance of teacher education programs are complex and interconnected. Individual actors' problems and coping strategies are essential for personal, professional development and achievement in their practicum and teaching profession.

According to the exploratory factor analysis results, student teachers' **common coping strategies** include successful coping strategies (problem-solving by self, adaptation to the

situation, seeking professional support, and getting emotional support) and unsuccessful coping strategies (avoidance and corporal punishment). Successful coping strategies can manage their problems and improve their performance during practicum. This can lead to achieving learning goals and building professional skills that will be useful in their future professional life. Unsuccessful coping strategies can lead to distress, dysfunction in teaching, diminishing students' learning opportunities, and retention from the profession. Unsuccessful coping strategies of individual actors can influence the practicum and university programs in teacher education. Admiraal (2020) suggests that teacher education supports student teachers with more approach-coping strategies instead of avoidance coping strategies.

Although student teachers developed their required competency standards from their university program, teacher education program in Myanmar has limitations in the areas of teaching methods and curriculum contents. Both student teachers and novice teachers complained about the more theoretically focused contents of the university curriculum of teacher education program. They felt that modern teaching methods such as problem-solving, discussion, and student-centered approaches from the university program are ineffective in the actual classroom situation. However, teacher education research in international research has also highlighted theory-practice gap in their teacher education curriculum (Zeincher, 2010; Korthagen, 2016; Livingston & Flores, 2017; OECD, 2019b). Thus, this current finding about more theoretically based curriculum is a common problem of teacher education program. Darling-Hammond and others (2002) discovered that well-prepared teachers could better use teaching strategies that respond to student's needs and learning styles.

Besides, this study discovered that the teaching methods offered at the university/college curriculum such as using student-centered approach, teaching aids during the lesson and group work activities were not compatible with the real classroom situations in schools. Student teachers needed help in using these approaches in their practicum. The curriculum of the university/education degree college program needs to include the contents of the possible difficulties that student teachers might face in their practicum. The lessons in a university/degree college program are more theoretical than practical. Teacher educators mostly used lecture methods and rarely included practical lessons—the curriculum contents of the university program needed to match the K12 school's curriculum fully. These results are the prominent elements that should be considered from the curriculum developer and policy makers of the teacher education curriculum at university/college level.

Referring to ecosystem theory and complexity theory, practicum in a teacher education program plays a vital role in understanding the complex nature of teaching and learning. The

actors such as students, teachers, and principals stand at the school level, student teachers, university teacher educators, practicum component and teacher education curriculum exist at the university level, and the informed policy for practicum component and structure at the teacher education curriculum position at the program level. However, all actors, functions and components are interrelated in a complex environment. Thus, it is crucial to consider various aspects such as its features, functions, infrastructure, contextual factors, and the roles of different actors at multiple levels. The structure, function, and interaction between different actors of all its components should be balanced to have a better system.

In short, the practicum and teacher education programs in Myanmar operate well in the Myanmar context; however, some areas of improvement are found in implementing the practicum and teacher education program such as the structure of the practicum period, evaluation and supervision, mentoring/support system and the contents of the teacher education curriculum. The findings of this study suggest that there is a need for continued research in the field of practicum and teacher education programs. However, this study's suggestions and practical implications are expected to inform the practice and policy of practicum and teacher education programs, including curriculum contents and teaching methods in Myanmar and other developing countries with similar contexts.

Suggestions

From this study,

For the better practicum system, it can be suggested that the practicum structure should be designed from the first year to the final year, including its different components and activities such as lesson study, peer group teaching, school visit and lesson observation, assistant teaching, portfolios, and practice teaching according to the local contexts and international context. Engagement time in school visits and practicum periods should be extended. The evaluation criteria should be clearly stated and transparent to all actors related to the practicum before the practicum period. Mentoring or support systems for student teachers should be practiced at the university level. It would be better to have an official mentor for student teachers to support them during their practicum period.

For a better teacher education system, the following should be considered: Infrastructure and resources such as wifi, library, databases, and technology that can help the teaching-learning situations and scientific work of student teachers and teacher educators should be granted. Policymakers and curriculum developers should check the implementation level and the outcomes of the new or reformed policy and curriculum.

In addition, Ministry of Education should provide: Encouraging innovation and creativity in teacher education by providing adequate funding and necessary resources.

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