

A STUDY OF TEACHER EDUCATORS' PERCEPTIONS AND TENSION TOWARDS PRACTICUM PRACTICE

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Abstract

The main purpose of this study is to investigate the level of teacher educators' perceptions and tension towards practicum practice. The research design for this study is descriptive research design. In this study, (150) teacher educators are randomly selected from Yankin, Thingangyun, Pathein, and Myaungmya Education Degree Colleges. A questionnaire with (60) items was used as an instrument. The questionnaire on five-point Likert-Scale was developed; strongly disagree, disagree, undecided, agree, and strongly agree. In order to describe the level of teacher educators' perceptions and tension towards practicum practice, mean, standard deviation, frequency, and percentage were used. Pearson product-moment correlation was used to find out the relationship between teacher educators' perceptions and tension towards practicum practice. The results showed that there was a negative correlation ($r = -.410$) between teacher educators' perceptions and tension towards practicum practice and there was a significant difference at 0.01 level (2-tailed). This indicated that teacher educators who have high positive perceptions towards practicum practice attain less tension towards practicum practice.

Keywords: Teacher Educator, Perception, Tension, Practicum, Teaching Practice

Introduction

The quality of education mainly depends on the teachers' qualifications, competency and level of professional development. In Myanmar society, education is traditionally valued as a key determinant for social mobility and it is widely recognised as a critical building block for nation building, national unity and sustainable development.

When considering educational reform in any country, in particular, a developing country such as Myanmar, several key points as to the importance of teacher training can be taken from the literature. Firstly, it is important for all teachers to be updated with current trends in teaching (Steadman, 2008). Secondly, teachers will be well-equipped and better qualified to provide their students the necessary skills and knowledge needed for their future career (Supriatna, 2015). Lastly, teachers in the primary and secondary schools should be trained in how to teach their students using different student-centered methodologies and teaching strategies to send competent students to university (Simon, 2013).

Statement of the Problem

Shulman (1986) stated that teaching has been described as a combination of an art, a craft and a science. In order to prepare pre-service teachers to teach effectively in 21st century classrooms, teacher education program should aim to develop the knowledge, skills and attributes of pre-service teachers.

In the introduction of practicum in teacher education, student teachers can understand the socio-cultural, political and economic factors and also first-hand experience. It is a critically important part of initial teacher education. Practicum experiences among pre-service teachers are often described as the most important part of teacher education program.

Thus, to attain the aim of the practicum practices in teaching program, teacher educators need to know and believe how important practicum practices in teacher training courses are. Furthermore, teacher educators should be well-prepared to face and overcome the tension

towards practicum practices. Therefore, by considering these problems, the perceptions and tension encountered by teacher educators in Education Degree Colleges in Myanmar are intended to assess.

Purposes of the Study

The main purpose of this study is to study teacher educators' perceptions and tension towards practicum practice. The specific objectives are as follows:

- to investigate the level of teacher educators' perceptions towards practicum practice
- to describe the level of teacher educators' tension towards practicum practice
- to find out the relationship between teacher educators' perceptions and tension towards practicum practice

Research Questions

This study is set out to answer the following research questions:

- Q1. To what extent do the teacher educators perceive the roles of practicum practice?
- Q2. To what extent do the teacher educators encounter tension towards practicum practice?
- Q3. Is there a relationship between teacher educators' perceptions and tension towards practicum practice?

Scope of the Study

This study is geographically restricted to Education Degree Colleges (EDCs) in Yangon and Ayeyarwaddy Regions. Participants in this study are (150) teacher educators from Yankin EDC, Thingangyun EDC, Patheingyi EDC, and Myaungmya EDC in 2021-2022 Academic Year. Sample participants are chosen by using simple random sampling method. To investigate teacher educators' perceptions in terms of pedagogical skills, professional skills, and assessment, the questionnaire of Qazi, Rawat and Thomas (2012), Aminudin (2012), and Joughin (2009) are used. To explore the tension encountered by teacher educators in practicum practice, dimensions of Berry (2007) are used.

Definition of Key Terms

Teacher Educator: A teacher educator is someone who teaches at a teacher education institution or supports students' field work in schools, and contributes substantially to the development of students towards becoming component teachers (Koster, 2002).

Perception: Perception refers to the beliefs or views of practicum stakeholders about the relevance of practicum program (Araya, 2013).

Tension: Tension is the feelings of internal turmoil that many teacher educators experience in their teaching about teaching as they find themselves pulled in different directions by competing concerns, and the difficulties for teacher educators in learning to recognize and manage these opposing forces (Berry, 2007).

Practicum: Practicum refers to a site where student teachers practice the art of teaching in real school context with student teachers assigned to one teacher and class for specific block of time (Zeichner, 1996).

Teaching Practice: Teaching practice represents the range of experiences to which student teachers are exposed when they work in classrooms and schools (Marais & Meier, 2004).

Review of Related Literature

The practicum was framed by theories of Jean Piaget's constructivist learning theory and Kolb's experiential learning theory. Piaget's cognitive constructivism described that learning is active process where learners construct their personal meaning through experiences. Learners build on their previous experiences in learning process and information is presented by the teacher. Learning by doing means that teachers have to provide hands-on experiences for students (Piaget, 1970).

Kolb (2015) described that knowledge is created through the transformation of experience. Knowledge results from the combination of grasping and transforming experience. Experiential learning theory provides holistic model of adult development, which are consistent with what people know about how they learn, grow and develop. Experiential learning is a particular form of learning from life experience; often contrasted it with lecture and classroom learning.

Qazi, Rawat and Thomas (2012) stated that practicum is relevant to enhance student teacher pedagogical or teaching skills and to prepare for the realities of classroom teaching through developing skills in them as lesson planning, preparation of subject relevant teaching aids and worksheets and classroom management skills. In order to attain the purpose of practicum, teacher educators need to take part in supervising, guiding, and assessing student teachers in practice teaching.

Teachers' professional development experiences allow to realise the changes taking place in the education system. Teacher educators' perceptions of what makes an effective professional development are influenced by several factors. One of the most significant factors to the effectiveness of any teachers' professional development is the strong focus on learning (Guskey, 2000).

To measure to what extent student teachers are competent and to help student teachers to reflect on their own practice and support their development, high quality assessment is crucial. Joughin (2009) identified three functions of assessment that predominate in higher education settings, such as supporting the process of learning, judging students' achievement in relation to course requirements, and maintaining the standards of the profession. Each of these functions is critical in the assessment of practicum.

Berry (2007) stressed that educating student teachers is never predictable and can never be fully controlled, and therefore requires substantial knowledge, experience, and understanding to do the right thing at the right moment. Teaching student teachers requires specific knowledge in specific situations. Teacher educators are confronted tensions with their development of pedagogical skill in teacher education. Berry (2007) conducted a systematic research on this topic and distinguished six main tensions as mentioned.

(1) Telling and growth

- between informing and creating opportunities to reflect and self-direct
- between acknowledging student teachers' needs and concerns and challenging them to grow

(2) Confidence and uncertainty

- between making explicit the complexities of teaching and helping student teachers feel confident to progress
- between exposing weakness as a teacher educator and maintaining student teachers' confidence in the teacher educator as a leader

(3) Action and intent

- between working towards a particular ideal and jeopardising that ideal by the approach chosen to attain it

(4) Safety and challenge

- between a constructive learning experience and an uncomfortable learning experience

(5) Valuing and reconstructing experience

- between helping students recognise the authority of their experience and helping them to see that there is more to teaching than simply acquiring experience

(6) Planning and being responsive

- between planning for learning and responding to learning opportunities

Research Method**Research Design**

The research design for this study is descriptive research design.

Population and Sample

Table 1 shows the sample size in the selected Colleges.

Table 1 Sample Size

No.	Region	District	Education Degree College	Number of Participant
1	Yangon	East	Yankin EDC	45
2	Yangon	East	Thingangyun EDC	30
3	Ayeyarwaddy	Pathein	Pathein EDC	50
4	Ayeyarwaddy	Myaungmya	Myaungmya EDC	25
	Total			150

Instrument

The main data gathering tool for the study was a set of questionnaire which was concerned with six dimensions namely: pedagogical skills; professional skills; assessment; safety and challenge; valuing and reconstructing experience; and planning and being responsive for teacher educators' perceptions and tension towards practicum practice.

Procedure

Firstly, the literature related to the research was studied. Then, a descriptive research design was selected. A questionnaire for teacher educators' perceptions and tension towards practicum practice was developed. In order to establish the reliability of the questionnaire, a pilot test was administered. After all, the data were collected and analyzed by using the Statistical Package for the Social Science (SPSS 22).

Data Analysis

In order to examine teacher educators’ perceptions and tensions towards practicum practice, mean, standard deviation, frequency, and percentage were used. Pearson product-moment correlation (*r*) was used to find the relationship between teacher educators’ perceptions and tension towards practicum practice.

Research Findings

This section presents the findings of the research based on the collected data. It includes three parts: the findings of teacher educators’ perceptions towards practicum practice; the findings of teacher educators’ tension towards practicum practice; and the findings of relationship between teacher educators’ perceptions and tension towards practicum practice.

Findings of Teacher Educators’ Perceptions towards Practicum Practice

In order to find out teacher educators’ perceptions towards practicum practice from Yankin, Thingangyun, Pathein and Myaungmya Education Degree Colleges (EDCs), a questionnaire was used with three dimensions.

Findings of Teacher Educators’ Perceptions in terms of Pedagogical Skills

In order to find out teacher educators’ perception in terms of pedagogical skills, (10) items were used. The average mean score and standard deviation by all the participants were (43.62) and (3.57) respectively. The scores for pedagogical skills ranged from (31) to (50) (see Table 2).

Table 2 Means of Teacher Educators’ Perceptions in terms of Pedagogical Skills in the Selected Education Degree Colleges

Education Degree College	No. of Participant	Mean	St. Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Yankin EDC	45	44.24	3.93	37	50
Thingangyun EDC	30	42.93	2.84	40	50
Pathein EDC	50	43.98	3.43	38	50
Myaungmya EDC	25	42.60	3.79	31	48
Total/Average	150	43.62	3.57	31	50

Of the total number of participants, 24% of teacher educators were at low level, 60% of teacher educators were at moderate level and 16% of teacher educators were at high level. The percentage of various groups was presented in Table 3.

Table 3 Percentage of Levels of Teacher Educators’ Perceptions in terms of Pedagogical Skills

Level of Pedagogical Skill	Score	No. of Teacher	Percentage (%)
Low	$x < 40.05$	37	24%
Moderate	$40.05 \leq x \leq 47.19$	89	60%
High	$x > 47.19$	24	16%
Total		150	100%

Findings of Teacher Educators' Perceptions in terms of Professional Skills

In order to find out teacher educators' perception in terms of professional skills, (10) items were used. The average mean score and standard deviation by all the participants were (42.34) and (3.98) respectively. The scores for professional skills ranged from (32) to (50) (see Table 4).

Table 4 Means of Teacher Educators' Perceptions in terms of Professional Skills in the Selected Education Degree Colleges

Education Degree College	No. of Participant	Mean	St. Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Yankin EDC	45	42.91	4.45	34	50
Thingangyun EDC	30	42.10	3.18	35	49
Pathein EDC	50	42.38	4.19	33	50
Myaungmya EDC	25	41.52	3.53	32	48
Total/Average	150	42.34	3.98	32	50

Of the total number of participants, 11% of teacher educators were at low level, 72% of teacher educators were at moderate level and 17% of teacher educators were at high level. The percentage of various groups was presented in Table 5.

Table 5 Percentage of Levels of Teacher Educators' Perceptions in terms of Professional Skills

Level of Professional Skill	Score	No. of Teacher	Percentage (%)
Low	$x < 38.36$	17	11%
Moderate	$38.36 \leq x \leq 46.32$	107	72%
High	$x > 46.32$	26	17%
Total		150	100%

Findings of Teacher Educators' Perceptions in terms of Assessment

In order to find out teacher educators' perceptions in terms of assessment, (10) items were used. The average mean score and standard deviation by all the participants were (42.81) and (3.99) respectively. The score for assessment ranged from (32) to (50) (see Table 6).

Table 6 Means of Teacher Educators' Perceptions in terms of Assessment in the Selected Education Degree Colleges

Education Degree College	No. of Participant	Mean	St. Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Yankin EDC	45	43.49	4.26	36	50
Thingangyun EDC	30	41.67	3.39	32	49
Pathein EDC	50	43.08	3.95	36	50
Myaungmya EDC	25	42.44	4.17	32	50
Total/Average	150	42.81	3.99	32	50

Of the total number of participants, 8% of teacher educators were at low level, 68% of teacher educators were at moderate level and 24% of teacher educators were at high level. The percentage of various groups was presented in Table 7.

Table 7 Percentage of Levels of Teacher Educators' Perceptions in terms of Assessment

Level of Assessment	Score	No. of Teacher	Percentage (%)
Low	$x < 38.82$	11	8%
Moderate	$38.82 \leq x \leq 46.80$	103	68%
High	$x > 46.80$	36	24%
Total		150	100%

Overall Findings of Teacher Educators' Perceptions towards Practicum Practice

According to the participants' response, the mean score of teacher educators' perceptions towards practicum practice was presented (see Table 8).

Table 8 Mean of Teacher Educators' Perceptions towards Practicum Practice

Dimension	N	Mean	St. Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Perceptions	150	128.77	10.56	95	150

According to the results in Table 9, most of the teacher educators in Education Degree Colleges possessed a moderate level in perceptions towards practicum practice.

Table 9 Percentage of Levels of Teacher Educators' Perceptions towards Practicum Practice

Level of Teacher Educators' Perception	Score	No. of Teacher	Percentage (%)
Low	$x < 118.21$	17	11%
Moderate	$118.21 \leq x \leq 139.33$	101	68%
High	$x > 139.33$	32	21%
Total		150	100%

Findings of Teacher Educators' Tension towards Practicum Practice

In order to find out teacher educators' tension towards practicum practice from Yankin, Thingangyun, Pathein and Myaungmya Education Degree Colleges, a questionnaire of three dimensions: safety and challenge, valuing and reconstructing experience, and planning and being responsive was used.

Findings of Teacher Educators' Tension in terms of Safety and Challenge

In order to find out teacher educators' tension in terms of safety and challenge, (10) items were used. The average mean score and standard deviation by all the participants were (27.79) and (6.97) respectively. The scores for safety and challenge ranged from (12) to (47) (see Table 10).

Table 10 Means of Teacher Educators' Tension in terms of Safety and Challenge in the Selected Education Degree Colleges

Education Degree College	No. of Participant	Mean	St. Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Yankin EDC	45	27.24	7.20	12	40
Thingangyun EDC	30	26.27	6.72	20	40
Pathein EDC	50	28.50	7.12	18	47
Myaungmya EDC	25	29.16	6.49	16	40
Total/Average	150	27.79	6.97	12	47

Of the total number of participants, 18% of teacher educators were at low level, 61% of teacher educators were at moderate level and 21% of teacher educators were at high level. The percentage of various groups was presented in Table 11.

Table 11 Percentage of Levels of Teacher Educators' Tension in terms of Safety and Challenge

Level of Safety and Challenge	Score	No. of Teacher	Percentage (%)
Low	$x < 20.82$	27	18%
Moderate	$20.82 \leq x \leq 34.76$	92	61%
High	$x > 34.76$	31	21%
Total		150	100%

Findings of Teacher Educators' Tension in terms of Valuing and Reconstructing Experience

In order to find out teacher educators' tension in terms of valuing and reconstructing experience, (10) items were used. The average mean score and standard deviation by all the participants were (23.37) and (6.23) respectively. The scores for valuing and reconstructing experience ranged from (10) to (44) (see Table 12).

Table 12 Means of Teacher Educators' Tension in terms of Valuing and Reconstructing Experience in the Selected Education Degree Colleges

Education Degree College	No. of Participant	Mean	St. Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Yankin EDC	45	22.31	7.29	10	40
Thingangyun EDC	30	22.47	5.93	12	40
Pathein EDC	50	24.84	5.89	15	44
Myaungmya EDC	25	23.40	4.74	13	33
Total/Average	150	23.37	6.23	10	44

Of the total number of participants, 13% of teacher educators were at low level, 70% of teacher educators were at moderate level and 17% of teacher educators were at high level. The percentage of various groups was presented in Table 13.

Table 13 Percentage of Levels of Teacher Educators’ Tension in terms of Valuing and Reconstructing Experience

Level of Valuing and Reconstructing Experience	Score	No. of Teacher	Percentage (%)
Low	$x < 17.14$	20	13%
Moderate	$17.14 \leq x \leq 29.60$	105	70%
High	$x > 29.60$	25	17%
Total		150	100%

Findings of Teacher Educators’ Tension in terms of Planning and Being Responsive

In order to find out teacher educators’ tension in terms of planning and being responsive, (10) items were used. The average mean score and standard deviation by all the participants were (23.64) and (6.49) respectively. The scores for planning and being responsive ranged from (10) to (42) (see Table 14).

Table 14 Means of Teacher Educators’ Tension in terms of Planning and Being Responsive in the Selected Education Degree Colleges

Education Degree College	No. of Participant	Mean	St. Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Yankin EDC	45	22.29	7.97	10	40
Thingangyun EDC	30	23.03	5.64	15	40
Pathein EDC	50	25.00	5.98	14	42
Myaungmya EDC	25	24.08	5.09	13	35
Total/Average	150	23.64	6.49	10	42

Of the total number of participants, (14%) of teacher educators were at low level, (73%) of teacher educators were at moderate level and (13%) of teacher educators were at high level. The percentage of various groups was presented in Table 15.

Table 15 Percentage of Levels of Teacher Educators’ Tension in terms of Planning and Being Responsive

Level of Planning and Being Responsive	Score	No. of Teacher	Percentage (%)
Low	$x < 17.15$	21	14%
Moderate	$17.15 \leq x \leq 30.13$	110	73%
High	$x > 30.13$	19	13%
Total		150	100%

Overall Findings of Teacher Educators’ Tension towards Practicum Practice

According to the participants’ response, the mean score of teacher educators’ tension towards practicum practice was presented (see Table 16).

Table 16 Mean of Teacher Educators' Tension towards Practicum Practice

Dimension	N	Mean	St. Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Tension	150	74.79	18.25	32	133

In order to assess the levels of teacher educators' tension, the percentage of various groups was presented in Table 17. According to the results, most of the teacher educators in Education Degree Colleges were moderate level in tension towards practicum practice.

Table 17 Percentage of Levels of Teacher Educators' Tension towards Practicum Practice

Level of Tension	Score	No. of Teacher	Percentage (%)
Low	$x < 56.54$	21	14%
Moderate	$56.54 \leq x \leq 93.04$	106	70%
High	$x > 93.04$	23	16%
Total		150	100%

Relationship between Teacher Educators' Perceptions and Tension towards Practicum Practice

Pearson product-moment correlation was used to find out the relationship between teacher educators' perceptions and tension towards practicum practice. The following table represents the relationship.

Table 18 Relationship between Teacher Educators' Perceptions and Tension towards Practicum Practice

Variable		Perceptions	Tension
Perceptions	Pearson Correlation	1	-.410**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	150	150
Tension	Pearson Correlation	-.410**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	150	150

Note. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2- tailed).

According to Table 18, there is a relationship ($r = -.410$) between teacher educators' perceptions and tension towards practicum practice and significant at 0.01 level (2-tailed). This result shows that there is a moderate relation between teacher educators' perception and tension towards practicum practice. Moreover, these results show that the direction of correlation was negative. This means that if teacher educators' perception is high in one, they are low in tension towards practicum practice.

Discussion

The main purpose of the study is to study teacher educators' perceptions and tension towards practicum practice. This study also aimed to find the relationship between the teacher educators' perceptions and tension towards practicum practice.

Overall findings of teacher educators' perceptions towards practicum practice are also presented in this study. In the study, perceptions of 11% of teacher educators were at low level, 68% of teacher educators were at moderate level and 21% of teacher educators were at high level. Therefore, most of the teacher educators had not only no strongest perceptions but also average perceptions toward practicum practice.

Overall findings of teacher educators' tension towards practicum practice are also described in this study. In the research findings, tension of 14% teacher educators were at low level, 70% of teacher educators were at moderate level, and 16% of teacher educators were at high level in tension towards practicum practice. To sum up, most of the teacher educators' tension towards practicum practice were at moderate level.

The result of the Pearson product moment correlation showed that there was a significant correlation between teacher educators' perceptions and tension towards practicum practice. There was a significant correlation (-0.410) as a whole so the direction of correlation is negative. Therefore, it was found that teacher educators' perceptions towards practicum practice were negatively correlated to teacher educators' tension towards practicum practice. The summary of the research findings indicated that when the teacher educators' perceptions level rise, the teacher educators' tension level is low.

Suggestions

There are some subsequent suggestions for the teacher educators' perceptions and tension towards practicum practice. In order to meet the purpose of practicum program, teacher educators should adequately support student teachers to prepare for the world of work having the required qualifications. Student teachers need to be provided feedback timely in lesson planning, classroom practice teaching, and guide how to select and apply instructional methods in the class. This finding identified that the professional skills are important to ensure high quality teaching. Teachers should take their teaching experience to do lesson study before practice teaching, the ability to communicate and to engage students, their sensitivity to teach various groups, the ability to create a safe and stimulating learning environment in the classroom, and the ability to motivate students and to support reflection.

Conclusion

Based on the study, there is a relationship between teacher educators' perceptions and tension towards practicum. The more positive perceptions of teacher educators in practicum practice have, the less tension of teacher educators in practicum practice have. It is hoped that the study will give many concepts and suggestions with implementing practicum practice and could help the Ministry of Education to acknowledge the perceptions and tension of teacher educators in implementing practicum practice.

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