

English Language University Student-Teachers Challenges During Practicum in Iraqi Schools

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Abstract

The purpose of this research is to investigate the diverse difficulties experienced by student-teachers who are studying to become English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers. The focus of this research is particularly concerned with the 'shock' experience for many student-teachers who go through the reality of the classroom once they have completed their theoretical studies at university, specifically the transition from idealized or theoretical instruction to the limitations imposed by institutions. The research is grounded in a comprehensive theoretical framework which allows researchers to understand how both environment and personal development interact in relation to each other. A descriptive quantitative research method was used to collect data from 405 final year student-teachers at the University of Kerbala using a validated 38-item Likert scale survey instrument. Statistical analyses indicated that although the majority of student-teachers reported sufficient administrative support (mean=3.51), there were several obstacles to student-teachers including physical school facilities (mean=3.07) and access to educational technology (mean = 3.28). The research found that although student-teachers had moderate levels of flexibility with regard to curriculum design, they experienced significant pressures in terms of providing differentiated instruction and managing time constraints for developing and implementing lesson plans. The research concluded that the successful completion of the practicum is dependent on the health of the host institution, where there is open communication and mentoring.

Keywords: EFL Practicum, Student-Teachers, Teacher Education, Reality Shock, Pedagogical Content Knowledge.

تحديات الطلبة المطبقين في قسم اللغة الإبنجليزية أثناء التطبيق العملي في المدارس العراقية

حيدر كاظم خضير البيرماني إباء الدين حسام عباس الدليمي
 قسم اللغة الإنكليزية/ جامعة كربلاء

المستخلص

يهدف هذا البحث إلى استقصاء الصعوبات المتنوعة التي يواجهها الطلبة المطبقون المتخصصون في تدريس اللغة الإنجليزية بوصفها لغة أجنبية (EFL). ويركز البحث بشكل خاص على تجربة "صدمة الواقع" التي يمر بها العديد من الطلبة المطبقين عند مواجهة الواقع الفعلي للفضول الدراسية بعد إتمام دراستهم النظرية في الجامعة، وتحديدًا مرحلة الانتقال من التعليم المثالي أو النظري إلى القيود التي تفرضها المؤسسات التربوية.

يستند البحث إلى إطار نظري شامل يتيح للباحثين فهم كيفية تفاعل كل من البيئة المدرسية والتطور الشخصي مع بعضهما البعض. وقد اعتمدت الدراسة المنهج الوصفي الكمي لجمع البيانات من (٤٠٥) طالباً وطالبة في السنة النهائية بجامعة كربلاء، باستخدام أداة استبيان (مقياس ليكرت) مكونة من ٣٨ فقرة بعد التحقق من صدقها.

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أشارت التحليلات الإحصائية إلى أنه على الرغم من إفادة أغلبية الطلبة المطبقين بوجود دعم إداري كافٍ (بمتوسط حسابي ٣,٥١)، إلا أن هناك عقبات واجهتهم تتعلق بالمرافق المادية للمدارس (بمتوسط ٣,٠٧) ومدى توفر التكنولوجيا التعليمية (بمتوسط ٣,٢٨). وكشف البحث أنه على الرغم من تمتع الطلبة المطبقين بمستويات معتدلة من المرونة فيما يتعلق بتصميم المناهج، إلا أنهم واجهوا ضغوطاً كبيرة في تقديم التعليم المتميز (التعليم الذي يراعي الفروق الفردية) وإدارة القيود الزمنية اللازمة لتطوير خطط الدروس وتنفيذها. وخلص البحث إلى أن النجاح في إتمام فترة التطبيق العملي يعتمد على كفاءة المؤسسة المضيفة، ومدى توفر التواصل المفتوح والتوجيه التربوي المستمر.

الكلمات الدالة: التطبيق العملي للغة الإنجليزية، الطلبة المطبقون، إعداد المعلمين، صدمة الواقع، المعرفة التربوية بالمحتوى.

1. Introduction

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Student-teachers regard Practicum as the most challenging and stressful period of the teaching profession. Student-teachers have described this experience as a "baptism by fire". The transition from being a full-time student to becoming a practicing teacher is further complicated by the "theory-practice gap", as Korthagen [1] notes that "there is a perceived lack of relevance of many theoretical components of teacher education to the practice of teaching."

Years of theoretical training provide student-teachers with a solid foundation, nevertheless, it is at this point in time that they undergo a "transition shock", where their academic preparation collides with the reality of the institution.

The effectiveness of an intern teacher is highly reliant upon the school environment. If the expectations of the school and the intern teacher are unclear, and/or the communication channels are lacking, the intern teacher struggles to become integrated into the school. According to Hoy and Miskel [2], "A healthy school climate is a relatively enduring quality of the entire school that is experienced by participants." Many interns report feeling lost in schools with unclear expectations and limited opportunities for input.

In contrast to what would be ideal for the practicum to occur in the Zone of Proximal Development[3], where senior staff members can provide scaffolding, many student-teachers indicate a lack of constructive feedback and professional collaboration. As such, without a well-established connection between classroom practice and educational theory (especially through the supervisor's support), the intern teacher feels disconnected from the rest of his/her professional development.

Although the student-teachers know their subject matter, they frequently do not possess the Pedagogical Content Knowledge[4] needed to modify the rigid curriculum to meet the various needs of learners. Furthermore, resource scarcity (lack of resources, technology etc.) and differentiation difficulties (difficulty managing a variety of learning styles and classroom management issues) make it difficult for the student-teacher to provide effective instruction and adhere to administrative guidelines.

As a result of the cumulative impact of these challenges, many student-teachers see their Teacher Self-Efficacy fall dramatically. According to Bandura [5], self-efficacy is a "major factor in determining how much effort people will put into their work, and

how long they will continue working despite obstacles." When student-teachers feel overwhelmed by paperwork and/or unable to develop a positive relationship with students, their developing professional identity is under threat before their careers begin.

There is an urgent need to carefully assess these challenges in the Iraqi educational system to narrow the gap between the preparation of the student-teacher in the university and the reality of the school-based experience. Failing to do so could potentially result in "burn out" in pedagogical practices among the next generation of English language foreign language teachers.

1.2 Background of the Study

The Practicum Experience is identified world-wide as the most important aspect of all Teacher Education Programs. It serves as a bridge between Pedagogical Theory and the Realities of the Classroom[6]. The Practicum experience has an enormous potential to shape the professional identities of Student Teachers. However, for those Student Teachers who have chosen to specialize in the area of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) this experience is often filled with challenges that will ultimately influence the effectiveness of their teaching and long-term participation in the profession.

Student Teachers who choose to teach English as a foreign language have two major responsibilities. First, they must learn how to apply the instructional techniques associated with language teaching. Second, they must maintain a very high degree of proficiency in the use of the English language. There is evidence to suggest that many student-teachers who are learning English as a second/foreign language experience "Language Anxiety." In other words, they fear that their proficiency in English will not allow them to respond appropriately to questions from students or to serve as a linguistically correct model for their students[7][8]. This "language anxiety" is exacerbated when student teachers begin to realize the differences between what is taught about English language instruction in their teacher preparation program and what actually happens in real schools. As Veenman[9] noted, "Reality Shock" is a phenomenon that occurs when idealized teaching methods that were learned in teacher preparation programs meet the harsh realities of a school setting which includes overcrowding, limited resources, and strict curriculum guidelines.

The 45-day practicum experience, typical of many of today's Iraqi university educational settings, provides a high-pressure situation in which student teachers must adjust to the school culture and develop positive relationships with their students and mentor teachers. A significant amount of research indicates that the relationship with the mentor teacher is one of the most important factors in determining whether or not a student-teacher is successful or unsuccessful in the practicum[9]. Unfortunately, if a student-teacher does not receive adequate constructive feedback from their mentor teacher or if the philosophical approaches to teaching used by the student-teacher and the mentor teacher are too different, then the student-teacher will likely experience a great deal of stress during their practicum.

Although the practicum is a critical time in the development of Student-Teachers, it appears that there is a need to identify and describe the obstacles that are experienced by fourth year students studying English as a foreign language during their practicum. Identifying the various barriers that these student-teachers face, ranging from developing

classroom management skills to developing lesson plans to developing linguistic competence and access to institutional support will assist teacher education programs to better prepare future English as a foreign language teacher for the demands of the 21st century.

1.3 Research Questions

The present work aims at answering the following questions:

1. What are the primary pedagogical challenges encountered by final-year EFL student-teachers during their 45-day practicum?
2. How do institutional and environmental factors in the host schools impact the student-teachers' instructional performance?
3. To what extent does the practicum experience influence the professional identity and confidence of these future English teachers?

1.4 Research Objectives

The main objective of this research is to explore the practical experiences and hurdles of EFL student-teachers at the University of Kerbala. Specifically, the study seeks:

1. To identify the primary pedagogical challenges faced by final-year EFL student-teachers during their 45-day practicum in Iraqi schools.
2. To evaluate the impact of institutional and environmental factors (such as school facilities, administrative support, and classroom resources) on the instructional performance of student-teachers.
3. To examine the influence of the practicum experience on the development of professional identity and teaching confidence among future English language teachers.

1.5 Significance of the Study

The significance of this research is primarily due to its potential for transforming the preparation of teachers at the University of Kerbala and similar institutions in Iraq through the identification of systemic barriers to successful transition of university-based teacher education to the school environment. The research provides an evidence base to assist university departments in assessing the effectiveness of the pedagogy being used in the provision of teacher education programs. The research identifies specific gaps in preparedness of graduates in areas such as administrative transparency and availability of appropriate classroom facilities. Academic leaders will be able to use this information to inform strategic refinement of teacher education curricula to ensure that the transition from a university to a school environment is a structured process and not a "transition shock."

In addition, the findings from this research have significant relevance to both the Ministry of Education and school-based administrators. The findings clearly show that the school's organizational climate and the extent to which school principals are responsive to their needs directly impacts on the professional development of the intern teachers. In addition, by highlighting system-wide obstacles to the successful completion of an internship experience (i.e., limited access to technology; and lack of sufficient time to plan lessons), the findings of this study provide a rationale for developing additional systems of support for intern teachers. For example, in developing such systems of support, policy-makers could ensure that there is a more equitable distribution of

available resources and that there are established and clear policies and procedures to support newly hired teachers within the Iraqi educational system.

From a professional standpoint the research results are very relevant to developing strong mentoring/supervising systems at schools and universities. From a developmental standpoint it is also important that senior school staff and university supervisors provide "the scaffolding" to enable the student teachers to be in their Zone of Proximal Development. In addition to this, from an operational/developmental standpoint the research will encourage a collaborative and reflective approach to supervision as it will require university supervisors to link theoretical knowledge to practical classroom experiences. A collaborative and reflective model of supervision has the potential to transform the practicum from a potentially isolating experience to a guided and supported journey of professional growth.

Ultimately, the research also has significant personal and professional implications for the student-teachers themselves. Documenting and validating the specific challenges that student-teachers face (from managing student behavior to completing excessive paperwork) helps to promote a sense of professional resilience among student-teachers. Knowing that many of these challenges are the result of systemic barriers, rather than individual failures, helps to preserve the self-efficacy of future educators. The ultimate goal of this research is to prevent educator burn-out and provide the next generation of English as Foreign Language (EFL) teachers in Iraq with the confidence and support needed for long-term success.

In the present research, The Practicum(Teaching Practice), is defined operationally, as the formal time frame, when EFL student-teachers, from colleges of Education for Humanities, are placed in local schools, to carry out, what Lave and Wenger[10] have called "Legitimate Peripheral Participation", in a professional Community of Practice. This stage is essentially the major link between theoretical academic work and real classroom experiences. Lave and Wenger further note that,

"Learners inevitably participate in communities of practitioners and that the mastery of knowledge and skill requires newcomers to move toward full participation in the sociocultural practices of a community".

2 Theoretical Background

2.5 Organizational Climate Theory

As described by Hoy & Miskel [2], the Organizational Climate Theory presents a systematic approach to understanding the contextual barriers and challenges confronting Student Teachers in their professional development at school level. According to this theory, the climate within a school is an internal characteristic that differentiates one school from another and has a direct effect on how individuals behave within a school setting. The theory also states that the 'health' of an organization is not a secondary factor but rather the principal determinant of professional integration. Therefore, in terms of the present research, it is significant to measure the systemic dimensions (i.e., whether the School offers a supportive and welcoming atmosphere or a restrictive and closed environment).

When a school climate is transparent and responsive in its administrative practices, then the school acts as an open system which allows for effective learning processes to occur. Conversely, when there is no clear direction or when there is limited/absent responsiveness in communication, it demonstrates a malfunctioning organizational climate. Hoy and Miskel[2] have further argued that:

"In a climate of trust, teachers are more likely to be innovative and to take risks; whereas in a climate of suspicion, teachers will be more cautious and will act to protect themselves".

These systemic failures often affect EFL Student-Teacher as a Personal Pedagogical Struggle, yet the root cause of the struggle lies in the structural and institutional fabric of the school. When the expectations for new teachers are unclear or the administration does not respond to the needs of interns, the Student Teacher will experience a "Reality Shock" which is beyond the limitations of the individual competence of the Student Teacher. Through the analysis of these items via Systems Theory, the present research shifts the focus away from the individual performance of the Student-Teacher and towards the Institutional Health of the Iraqi Educational System, emphasizing that the success of a Student Teacher is directly related to the Openness and Supportiveness of the Host Organization.

2.6 Social Learning and Mentorship

Transitioning from a student of education to a teacher of students is fundamentally based upon social interactions with both the novice and the expert. This dimension is essential in the present work and is supported by Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory[3] and the Zone of Proximal Development(ZPD), which was developed from his work. The ZPD is defined as the difference between a learners' ability to complete a task using adult assistance and their ability to complete the task independently. In the Practicum setting, both the mentor teacher and the University Supervisor serve as the "More Knowledgeable Other" and provide the necessary scaffolding to bridge the gap.

Lave and Wenger's[10] theory of Situated Learning also supports this development process and provides additional understanding to the Practicum experience as a legitimate peripheral participation. Lave and Wenger [10] stated:

"The learning process occurs in a participation framework, rather than in the individual mind."

Without collaborative opportunities for student teachers and without connecting the practical application of classroom instruction to educational theories and concepts, the learning process is impeded. Without the specific support, such as senior staff members sharing best practices, or the mentor teacher providing positive constructive feedback as described in the survey, the student teacher will remain on the periphery of the professional community. From a social constructivist perspective, this study illustrates that mentorship is not a luxury, but a theoretical requirement to ensure successful professional socialization in the Iraqi English as a Foreign Language (EFL) environment.

2.7 Teacher Self-Efficacy and Student Interaction

Bandura's Self Efficacy Theory [5], is an appropriate lens to view the psychological aspects of the Practicum, as it defines self-efficacy as "a teacher's judgment of his or her capabilities to elicit desired responses from students, including

those students that are difficult to motivate.” Therefore, it is of paramount importance to measure how Student-Teachers’ build positive relationships with students, and meeting the needs of all students. Tschannen-Moran and Hoy [11] state:

"Teachers’ self-efficacy beliefs contribute to the goals they set, the effort they expend, and their resilience in the face of difficult situations."

Rotter’s[12] Locus of Control theory supports the pillar by explaining why many student-teachers experience being overwhelmed by administrative tasks and paperwork. When student-teachers believe that classroom challenges such as student behavior are within their control, then their self-efficacy is higher. As noted by Pajares[13] "the beliefs teachers hold influence their perceptions and judgments, which, in turn, affect their behavior in the classroom."

The research is able to identify whether the obstacles faced by student-teachers in Iraq cause a diminished self-efficacy (which is commonly a precursor to professional burnout). Knowing the demographic representation in the assigned classrooms and the resources provided for diverse learners allows for the collection of context needed to evaluate if the school environment enhances or diminishes the student-teacher's professional confidence.

2.4 Pedagogical Content Knowledge (PCK) & Curriculum Reality

Pedagogical Content Knowledge (PCK) bridges the gap between knowing a subject and being able to teach it in an effective way. Developed originally by Lee Shulman[4], PCK is defined as "the special amalgam of content and pedagogy that is uniquely the province of teachers." The difficulty student-teachers have in linking their assessment methods with instructional goals and/or providing differentiated instruction based on the diversity of students they encounter is a direct measure of the development of their student-teacher PCK.

Mishra and Koehler[14] identify a third critical component for successful teaching; this is the ability to understand how technology, pedagogy, and content work together. This interaction is especially relevant when evaluating access to technology necessary for lesson delivery.

Additionally, the "Curriculum Reality" factor has its foundation in the Theory of the Realized Curriculum. Although the "intended curriculum" is developed and intended by the Ministry of Education, the "realized curriculum" is what is practiced in the classroom. The realization of educational change can be impacted when teachers do not possess the "meaning" or the resources to put into practice the newly created curricula materials. The need for significant alteration of materials and the inability to flexibly adapt the curriculum to meet the individual needs of students, reflect this issue.

As Clandinin and Connelly[15] also stated:

"The teacher is an integral part of the curriculum constructed and enacted in classrooms."

Through evaluation of these elements, the present study illustrates that "practice precedes theory" rather than "theory precedes practice." For example, when student-teachers report that the curriculum materials they use are unengaging or that they have inadequate time to prepare lessons, they are experiencing the conflict between the idealism of educationally-related theory and the real-world logistical limitations of the Iraq EFL classroom.

2.5 Conclusion of the Theoretical Framework

This study's theoretical base is a multi-faceted map for moving through the complexities of the "reality shock" found within the EFL Practicum. The Organizational Climate Theory, Social Constructivism, Self-Efficacy Theory, and Pedagogical Content Knowledge are synthesized to provide an understanding of the obstacles faced by student-teachers during the practicum, rather than simply describing them at face value. The above theories demonstrate that the obstacles students face, as identified in the 38-questionnaire, are the direct results of a dynamic interaction between the institutional environment (administrative practices) and the individual student-teacher (mentorship, confidence). It was evident from the data that successful completion of the practicum is dependent on more than academic excellence alone. The overall structure and development of this theoretical base allows for the argument that improvement of the practicum in Iraq will require a comprehensive approach to bridge the "Theory-Practice Gap", through the support of school environments, stronger mentorship relationships and the provision of tools for teachers to implement effective practices in today's classroom.

3 Methodology

3.5 Research Design

A descriptive quantitative research design is used in this study to explore the challenges that student-teachers face during their practicum. The descriptive approach is suitable for investigating perceptions, experiences, and challenges of student-teachers in practice. The methodology adopted is a Survey-Based Analysis.

3.6 Population and Sample

The study population consisted of Iraqi EFL university undergraduate senior-year students who are enrolled in a practicum period. The student-teachers are in direct contact with the school educational environment, experiencing the challenges and demands of teaching for the first time.

In this study, a sample of 405 EFL University undergraduate senior-year students is chosen from the Department of English, College of Education for Human Sciences at the University of Karbala. This is a non-probability sampling method (convenience sampling) where a sample of the population consists of individuals who are easily accessible and willing to respond.

3.7 Research Instrument and Data Collection Methods

The study uses a structured questionnaire (Appendix 1) with 38 questions to measure various aspects of the students' teacher practicum experiences. The 38 questions are organized by category based on the theoretical bases from which the study was developed:

- Institutional and Administrative Environment (Items 1–10)
- Mentorship and Supervision (Items 11–15 and 21–25)
- Professional Efficacy and Student Interaction (Items 16–20 and 26)
- Pedagogical and Curricular Implementation (Items 27–38)

Each item uses a 5-point Likert Scale: Strongly Disagree (1), Somewhat Disagree (2), Neutral (3), Somewhat Agree (4), Strongly Agree (5). These tools will enable the

researchers to perform a quantitative analysis on the extent to which each respondent experienced the obstacles they have faced.

The research provides evidence of face and content validity through two forms of validation:

1. Face (and) Content Validity: The questionnaire was distributed to a panel of subject matter experts (Appendix3) who represented both the fields of EFL and Applied Linguistics. This panel of reviewers assessed each item contained in the questionnaire to determine whether it was clearly stated and relevant to the current educational environment in Iraq, and confirmed that each item was consistent with the purpose of the research. In addition to providing feedback to assist in refining the items, the reviewers confirmed that the items accurately reflected the types of obstacles that students could potentially experience during their practicum.

2. Construct Validity: The development of the tool utilized theoretical constructs previously identified in the literature review including organizational climate theory and self-efficacy theory. The researchers ensured that the 38 items of the tool were aligned with previous theoretical constructs; therefore, the researchers were able to determine that the data collected would represent the empirical nature of teacher education.

3.4 Data Analysis Techniques

Statistical descriptions for the data collected, including descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviation), are utilized to describe the participants' responses to the questions asked in the survey. Statistical packages (SPSS) will be employed for data analysis so that the results can be accurately interpreted.

The results of the analysis will be reported using tables, and figures to illustrate the results clearly. This study's findings will be discussed in the context of existing literature in this field to give an overall view of the practicum challenges that student teachers face, to provide recommendations to the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research.

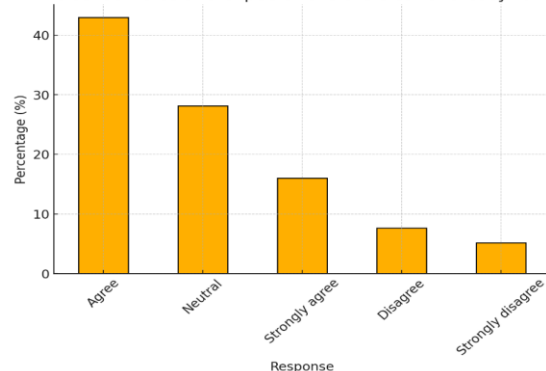
4 Data Analysis

The section presents the overview results of analysis conducted with 405 senior year student teachers from the University of Kerbala to determine the practicum challenges that these students encountered. This data analysis is based primarily on descriptive statistical measures (e.g., frequencies, percent, mean, SD) to display the patterns and trends found in the answers.

4.5 Descriptive Statistics

4.5.1 School Environment and Administrative Support

1. The school rules and expectations are clear and easy to follow.

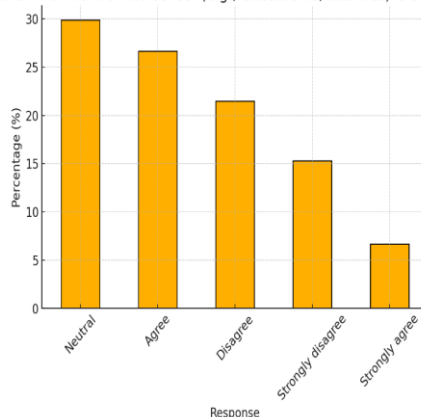
**Figure 1:** Student-teacher's perceptions of school rules and expectations.

According to the responses, 42.96% of the student-teachers agreed that school rules and expectations were clear and easy to follow, while 28.15% were neutral and 7.65% disagreed. The average rating of opinions toward school rules was 3.45 (SD = 0.67), suggesting a slightly above-neutral agreement. Some responses raised concerns regarding the physical environment of the school as conducive to learning (only 26.67% thought so, while 21.48% disagreed with a mean of 3.07 (SD = 0.78)- which appears to be less than ideal concerning infrastructure or classroom resources. These results, visualized in Figure 1 above and Table I below,

Table 1: Mean and Standard Deviation of Key Survey Questions

Question	Mean	Standard Deviation
The school rules and expectations are clear.	3.45	0.67
The physical environment is conducive to learning.	3.07	0.78
The overall school climate is supportive.	3.33	0.72
The school effectively manages student behavior.	3.66	0.93

2. The physical environment of the school (e.g., classrooms, facilities) is conducive to learning.

**Figure 2:** Perceptions of the school's physical environment.

In terms of school climate, 35.31% agreed that the overall school climate was welcoming, while 27.90% agreed and 11.11% disagreed. The average (mean) score for

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school climate was 3.33 (SD=0.72), indicating moderate satisfaction. Regarding the effectiveness of school management in managing student behavior, 37.04% of the respondents agreed, while 18.02% strongly agreed and 11.85% disagreed. The mean score for this factor was 3.66 (SD=0.93), indicating a generally positive perception but with some variance. As demonstrated in Figure 2.

4.1.2 Administrative Communication and Guidance

6. The school administration provides clear guidance and expectations for new teachers.

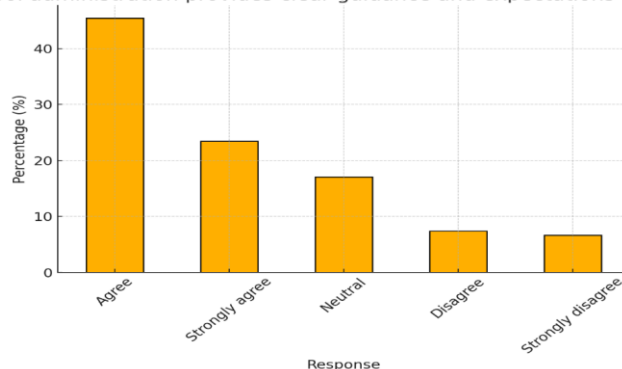


Figure 3: Clarity of administrative guidance for student-teachers.

Regarding the availability of administrative transparency and support, 45.43% of the respondents agreed that the school administration gave clear guidelines to new teachers, and 23.46% strongly agreed. Nevertheless, 7.41% (n=9)disagreed, which means some student-teachers did not receive the right level of administrative support. The average administrative guidance score was 3.51 (SD=0.72), indicating a relatively positive perception though with some variance.

Table 2: Mean and Standard Deviation of Administrative Support

Question	Mean	Standard Deviation
The school administration provides clear guidance.	3.51	0.72
I feel comfortable approaching the administration.	3.48	0.71

4.1.3 Curriculum Flexibility and Lesson Planning Challenges

29.The curriculum allows for enough flexibility to address the diverse needs of my students.

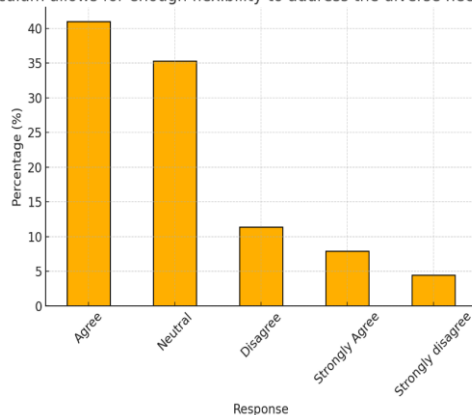


Figure 4: Perceived flexibility of the curriculum for diverse student needs.

The student-teachers corroborated that the curriculum catered to diverse student needs; 40.99% agreed, 7.90% strongly agreed, and 11.36% disagreed. The mean curriculum flexibility score was 3.48 (SD=0.68), indicating a moderate level of agreement.

Lesson planning was another major task where 34.07% agreed while 17.78% disagreed, noting a time limitation that can hinder the process. The overall average score for the reliability of lesson plan time adequacy, in particular, was 3.32 (SD = 0.74), which showed that although some student-teachers found the time adequate, for others, it was not the case.

Table 3: Mean and Standard Deviation of Curriculum and Lesson Planning

Question	Mean	Standard Deviation
The curriculum is flexible for diverse student needs.	3.48	0.68
I have adequate time for lesson planning.	3.32	0.74
The curriculum materials require significant adaptation.	3.28	0.77

4.1.4 Access to Resources and Professional Development

34. I lack access to necessary resources (e.g., technology, materials) to implement my lesson plans effectively.

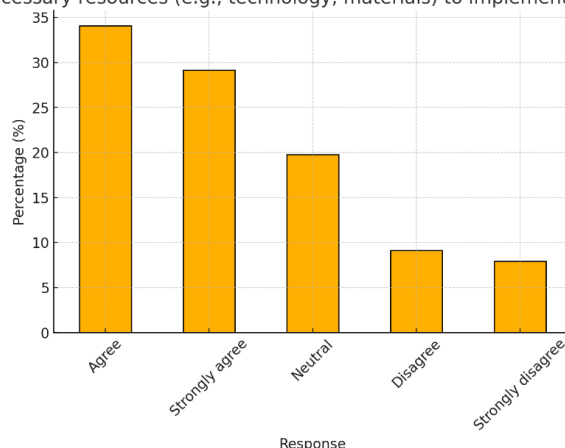


Figure 5: Student-teachers' access to instructional resources.

The largest area of difficulty was reported by student teachers concerning the access to necessary tools (technology and materials) to teach. 34.07% stated they had no access to those resources and 29.14% strongly agreed that lack of access to those resources was a major problem. The mean response for resource access was 3.28 (S.D.=0.77). This shows the issue of resource availability is an important one but moderate at best.

Regarding professional development, 35.80% of student teachers said their school provided them with adequate training for their job, while 17.78% said their school didn't provide the appropriate training for them. Student teachers were also asked how encouraged they were to engage in professional development. A total of 41.48% of student teachers indicated they would engage in professional development; a surprising

number considering 38.02% of student teachers were very interested in continuing to learn professionally.

Table 5: Mean and Standard Deviation of Resource Availability and Professional Development

Question	Mean	Standard Deviation
I have access to the necessary teaching resources.	3.28	0.77
The school offers professional development.	3.35	0.75
I feel encouraged to participate in professional development.	3.52	0.73

4.6 Summary of Key Findings

- Administrative support was overall viewed to be sufficient, but some responded to being challenged to receive clear directives.
- School infrastructure and resources were a challenge, with a significant proportion of student-teachers indicating that they did not have necessary teaching materials.
- Academic Support: A lot of time is spent changing the curriculum to fit the online environment -lesson plans were a big issue; Curriculum was very adaptable.
- Some opportunities to develop professionally were available, but attendance rates were mixed.

The above findings provide a foundation for a larger discussion of the implications of the challenges and ways to make the practicum experience more successful for future student teachers.

5 Conclusion and Recommendations

5.5 Conclusion

The study looked at the problems that student teachers at the University of Kerbala experienced with their senior year practicum. In addition to the issues listed above, other issues identified by the findings include the level of administrative support, the degree of flexibility in the curriculum, difficulty in developing lesson plans, availability of resources, and opportunities for professional development?

Regardless of the differences, the study indicates that while the school administration provided a fair amount of direction and support, many of the student teachers reported having difficulty in receiving clear communication and transparency from school administrators. Likewise, although many of the respondents indicated the same level of flexibility would be desirable in the curriculum, a high percentage of the respondents indicated that they had difficulty in adapting their lessons, and providing differentiated instruction for students with diverse needs. A major barrier to successful online teaching and learning, according to the paper, are the challenges of pedagogic continuity, including limited access to technology tools and instructional materials required to implement lesson plans. In addition, the time constraints involved in lesson planning created additional pressures for student teachers,

many of whom found it difficult to develop quality lesson plans. Although there are currently existing professional development opportunities available, not all respondents were encouraged to participate in those opportunities, and many respondents felt that they were not motivated sufficiently to participate, or that they did not have access to professional development that addressed their needs.

In general, the issues identified above indicate the need for improved administrative support, resource allocations, curriculum adaptability, and professional development practices to support the student teacher practicum experience and prepare them for their career.

5.6 Recommendations

The researchers propose the following recommendations based on the findings of the study:

1. Improving Administrative Support and Communication

- Schools should develop structured mentorship programs that pair student-teachers with seasoned educators for mentorship.
- A pressing need to conduct regular feedback sessions to address student-teachers concerns and clarify expectations.
- Administrative communication and guidelines should be placed on digital platforms (e.g. online portals or mobile apps) for access.

2. Enhancing flexibility in curriculum design and lesson planning

- Educational institutions must design adaptive curriculums allowing a more extensive variety of teaching methodologies.
- Student-teachers need to be trained on more differentiation and classroom management strategies so that they can teach and manage the students who are in a classroom.
- Schools need to alleviate student-teachers from an excessive amount of non-teaching activities or administrative tasks to enable them to prepare lessons.

3. Managing Resource Limitations

- The Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research need to invest in teaching materials and various kinds of digital resources to encourage student-teachers.
- Institutions must partner with technology specialists, retailers, and educational companies to provide discounted or complimentary access to e-learning tools and teaching support.
- There is a need for a central resource-sharing system through which student-teachers can access digital libraries.

4. Fortifying Professional Development Programs

- Universities must facilitate compulsory workshops on lesson planning, assessment design, and classroom management before student-teachers embark on their practicum.
- More opportunities for peer collaboration should be encouraged, such as teaching circles, and reflective conversations where student-teachers can share experiences and strategies.

- Professional development participation certifications should be issued by schools, encouraging student-teachers to participate in training programs.

Strategic intervention and focused reform can certainly improve the quality of the practicum for student teachers in Iraq by implementing the recommendations for a smoother transition from their academic preparation into their classroom realities. A future study is suggested to determine the long term effects of the improved practicum experiences upon teacher effectiveness, as well as if the improvements will be sustained.

CONFLICT OF IN TERESTS

There are no conflicts of interest

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Appendix 1

Post-Validation research questionnaire

N	Question	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
1.	The school rules and expectations are clear and easy to follow.					
2.	The physical environment of the school (e.g., classrooms, facilities) is conducive to learning.					
3.	The overall school climate feels supportive and welcoming.					
4.	There are clear consequences for students who violate school rules.					
5.	The school effectively manages student behavior issues outside the classroom.					
6.	The school administration provides clear guidance and expectations for new teachers.					
7.	I feel comfortable approaching the administration with questions or concerns.					
8.	The administration is responsive to the needs of new student-teachers.					
9.	The administration is transparent in their communication with teachers.					
10.	The administration values the input of new teachers.					
11.	I have received adequate support and mentorship from senior staff members.					
12.	Senior staff are approachable and willing to offer guidance to new intern teachers.					
13.	I feel like I can collaborate effectively with senior staff members.					
14.	Senior staff members share best practices and resources readily.					
15.	I feel comfortable observing lessons taught by senior staff members.					
16.	The student presents a manageable classroom behavior challenge.					
17.	I feel prepared to meet the diverse needs of my students.					
18.	I am confident in my ability to build positive relationships with my students.					
19.	The school provides adequate resources to support students with diverse learning needs.					
20.	The student body demographics are well-represented in my assigned classes					
21.	My supervisor provides helpful and constructive feedback during classroom observations.					

22	I feel comfortable discussing challenges with my supervisor.					
23	My supervisor offers adequate support and guidance for my professional development.					
24	My supervisor sets clear expectations for my internship experience.					
25	My supervisor helps me connect my classroom practice to educational theory					
26	I feel overwhelmed by the amount of paperwork and administrative tasks required.					
27	The curriculum materials provided are engaging and effective for student learning.					
28	The curriculum materials provided are aligned with the learning objectives for my grade level.					
29	The curriculum allows for enough flexibility to address the diverse needs of my students.					
30	The curriculum provides opportunities for students to engage in critical thinking and problem-solving.					
31	I feel confident in my ability to effectively implement the curriculum with minimal modifications.					
32	I have adequate time for lesson planning and preparation.					
33	The curriculum materials require significant adaptation to be effective in my classroom.					
34	I lack access to necessary resources (e.g., technology, materials) to implement my lesson plans effectively.					
35	Differentiating instruction for diverse learners is a major challenge in my lesson planning process.					
36	Aligning assessments with the curriculum objectives is a difficult aspect of lesson planning.					
37	The school offers professional development opportunities relevant to new teachers.					
38	I feel encouraged to participate in professional development opportunities.					

Appendix 2

Pre-Validation research questionnaire

1. The rules at this school are clear for everyone to follow.
2. The classrooms and buildings are in good condition for teaching.
3. I feel welcome when I walk into the school.
4. There are punishments for students who misbehave.
5. The school handles bad behavior well, even in the halls.
6. The Principal gives new teachers clear instructions.

7. I can ask the Principal questions without feeling nervous.
8. The school leaders help me when I have a problem.
9. The administration tells us what is happening in the school.
10. The school cares about my ideas.
11. I get a lot of help from the older teachers.
12. Senior teachers are nice and give me advice.
13. I am able to work with other teachers on my lessons.
14. Other teachers share their worksheets and tips with me.
15. I can watch other teachers give their lessons.
16. My students' behavior is easy enough to handle.
17. I am ready to teach all the different students in my class.
18. I have a good friendship/relationship with my students.
19. The school has tools for students who learn differently.
20. My classes represent the different types of people in the school.
21. My supervisor gives me tips after watching me teach.
22. I can talk to my supervisor about my teaching problems.
23. My supervisor helps me grow as a teacher.
24. I know what the university expects from me during my 45 days.
25. My supervisor explains how books relate to real teaching.
26. I have too much paperwork and office work to do.
27. The textbooks we use are fun for the students.
28. The books match the goals for my grade level.
29. I can change the lesson plan if my students don't understand.
30. The lessons make students think for themselves.
31. I can use the curriculum without having to change it much.
32. I have enough time during the day to plan my lessons.
33. I have to change a lot of the book materials to make them work.
34. I don't have enough computers or projectors for my lessons.
35. It is hard to plan for students with different levels of English.
36. It is hard to make tests that match the lesson goals.
37. The school has training classes for new teachers.
38. I am told I should go to teacher training meetings.

Appendix 3

List of Jury Members

N	Sci-Title	Name	Specialty	University
1	Prof.Dr	Assim Aboud Zibbar	Methods of Teaching English	Retired
2	Prof.Dr	Sabeeha Hamza Deham	Methods of Teaching English	Babylon
3	Prof.Dr	Hussien Mousa Kadhim	Applied. Linguistics	Karbala
4	Asst.Prof.Dr	Tawfeek Majeed Ahmed	Applied. Linguistics	Karbala
5	Asst.Prof.Dr	Hamid Gittan Jewad	Applied. Linguistics	Karbala
6	Lect	Ramziay Khalil Ismail	Language Teaching Methodologies	Mosul