



**RESEARCH PAPER**

**Challenges Faced by Prospective Teachers in Teaching Practicum: A Phenomenological Approach**

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**ABSTRACT**

Teaching practicum is an activity that provides prospective teachers a platform where they practice teaching in a real classroom environment. The purpose of this qualitative (descriptive phenomenology) study is to explore the challenges and opportunities in constructing the professional identities of prospective teachers based on their lived experiences. Six final year students of B.Ed. (Hons.) were purposively selected as sample of the study. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews and analyzed thematically which yielded two major themes each comprised of four subthemes. The first theme was challenges in teaching practicum and its subthemes were overcrowded classrooms, multigrade teaching, classroom management, and poor infrastructure. The second theme was locating the challenges in development of professional identity of prospective teachers and its subthemes were gaining confidence in new role, strengthening teaching skills, problem solving approaches, and integration of new perspective. Future studies may be conducted on the other aspects of practicum for constructing different perspectives of prospective teachers' professional identity.

**KEYWORDS** Professional Identity, Prospective Teachers, Teaching Practicum

**Introduction**

A prospective teacher is a student enrolled in Bachelors of Education (B.Ed.) programme (Huang & Wang, 2024). At the initial semesters for three years prospective teachers' learning focuses on understanding the theory of teaching and the teacher's role. They The prospective teachers only learn the basic teaching skills i.e. designing lesson plans, managing the classroom, and implementing teaching methods (Fitriati et al., 2024). At the end of the program, they are expected to practice learned skills in classroom settings (Shaukat & Chowdhury, 2020). Teaching practice commonly known as teaching practicum (TP) acts as a bridge between theoretical knowledge and practical application (Pakpahan, 2023). It is an activity that provides prospective teachers with a platform where they perform their content knowledge in a real classroom context (Masood et al., 2022).

The Teaching Practicum is considered as the major influencing factor on the future career of prospective teachers in shaping their professional identity (Suyatno et al., 2023). It is a compulsory course approved by the Higher Education Commission (HEC) Pakistan for B. Ed. (Hons) 4-year degree program and Associate Degree in Education (ADE) 2-year associate degree program to improve quality of education. Maharni and Fithriani (2023) depicted that it is difficult for prospective teachers to shift their role from student to teacher and create their professional identity as teachers. Prospective teachers work on different tasks during the course that includes school-

based tasks (SBTs), implement lesson plans in real classroom settings, portray their experiences in practicum seminars, and reflect all the experiences in a portfolio (Harun & Samat, 2021). Practicums equip prospective teachers with knowledge, skills, and experiences that enhance their expertise as future teachers and shape their professional identities (Suyato et al., 2023).

The Teaching practicum is the key aspect in developing the professional identity of prospective teachers but there are many challenges for student teachers during teaching practicum (Gilani et al., 2020). This has become the research center for many researchers, past studies discussed various facets including interacting with selected practicum schools and working with cooperative teachers and supervisors (Imsa-ard et al., 2021), scheduling to execute lessons in the classes (Huang & Wang, 2024) proper arrangement of practicum seminars, interpersonal relations classroom discipline (Nababan & Amalia, 2021).

Despite this above mentioned studies it has been found that very little focus was given to the lived experience of prospective teachers in facing different challenges and developing their professional identities as teachers. This urges the researchers to explore the challenges and opportunities in constructing their professional identities based on the lived experiences of prospective teachers in teaching practicum at three different universities of North Sindh i.e. The Shaikh Ayaz University Shikarpur (TSAUS), Shah Abdul Latif University Khairpur (SALU) and The Begum Nusrat Bhutto Women University Sukkur (BNBWU).

### **Literature Review**

Teaching Practicum is the most substantial element in the teacher education program. It is a major significant aspect in enhancing teachers' quality (Maqsood et al., 2022). Beribe (2023) considers teaching practicum as the heart of the teacher development process, as it allows the prospective teacher to experience teaching in a real classroom setting. Teaching practicum is a first step towards constructing the professional identity of prospective teachers, as it is designed to apply the learned theoretical knowledge in a school context (Natadireja & Nurachadijat, 2024). It is also known as student teaching comprises a period of supervised teaching practice that is part of the training for prospective teachers, they work closely with experienced teachers to gain practical understanding, receive feedback on their teaching performance, and gradually take on more responsibility for planning and delivering instruction (Kiok & Swanto, 2021). This hands-on experience is an important component of teacher preparation programs and helps aspiring educators develop the necessary skills and confidence to become effective teachers (Kakazu & Kobayashi, 2023). In the current context of the study, little insights are available about the prospective teachers, which alludes to further exploration.

### **Roadblocks to Success: Prospective Teachers confronting Challenges in Teaching Practicum**

Prospective teachers usually face three most prominent challenges related to self, students, and cooperative teachers/supervisors during their teaching practicum (Collantes, 2021). As far as the self-related challenges are concerned the prospective teachers are inept at coping with diverse challenges in technical terms resulting in stress and anxiety, and this leads them to quit their profession early (Imsa-ard et al., 2021). Additionally, Nababan and Amalia (2021) claim that a less supportive environment can negatively affect the feelings of a prospective teacher resulting in worry, tension, and stress during the teaching practicum process. Moreover, Trent (2023) depicts that

prospective teachers found it very difficult to practice modern, innovative, and interactive methodologies in classrooms. Similarly, Simorangkir and Setijadi (2022) revealed that prospective teachers had difficulty in implementing the activities as per their lesson plan and pace according to their students' level of learning.

Prospective teachers also face student-related challenges, Ryan and Ryan (2021) state that prospective teachers struggle with classroom management, and the lack of ability to manage the classroom is directly related to their skill of dealing with students. In addition to this, Simorangkir and Setijadi (2022) portray that prospective teachers face hindrances in selecting the appropriate strategy/methodology as per their students' discipline and motivational level. Furthermore, lack of experience and being novices in teaching they struggle with classroom management, implementation of lesson planning, and meeting the diverse needs of students (Martin & Cataneo, 2023).

Besides self-related challenges and student-related challenges, the supervisor and cooperative teachers' less concern regarding teaching practicum also hinders the process for prospective teachers (Collantes, 2021). Trent (2023) claimed that resistance from supervisors or cooperative teachers impedes the beliefs of prospective teachers in practicing effective pedagogies and modern techniques. Also, the choice of school selected by a prospective teacher is a significant contributor to the effective teaching practicum process (Maqsood et al., 2022). As it is expected from prospective teachers to spend more time and work with cooperative teachers, lead them towards a dilemma of whether to apply their theoretical knowledge or to abide by the academic regulations of the schools (Gillani et al, 2020).

The above literature identified the methodological gap in the context of the study. Different studies adopted the quantitative approach using the survey technique (Masood et al., 2022), and few of them adopted the qualitative approach using a case study (Suyanto et al., 2023), focused group discussion (Imsa-ard et al., 2021), content analysis (Pakpahan, 2023) but hardly any study was found in the context using a descriptive phenomenological approach. Thus, the literature necessitated to explore the challenges faced by prospective teachers during teaching practicum.

### **Building Blocks of Pedagogical Excellence: Opportunities in Shaping the Professional Identity of Prospective Teachers**

Professional identity refers to an individual's self-image, roles, and responsibilities regarding how one acts in a specific profession (Mockler, 2022). It is a contextual construct that can change across different times at different contexts based on the interaction between individuals in their society (Giralt & Castello, 2024). Teachers' professional identity is based on educational beliefs that social context plays a key role in professional development, and instructional decision-making (Beijaard & Schellings, 2023). Teaching practicum is a significant opportunity for prospective teachers to enhance their teaching skills (Beribe, 2023). This enables them to gain and learn effective teaching skills after graduation (Diamond & Wilbur, 2024).

The current literature highlighted two aspects that influence the construction of prospective teachers's professional identities; personal and professional (Beijaard & Schellings, 2023; Giralt & Castello, 2024; Mutalib & Dylan, 2021). Personal factors include gender (Edwards & Edwards, 2017), age (Mockler, 2022), learning experiences (Maharani, 2023), emotion (Mutalib & Dylan, 2021), self-efficacy (Chen & Lu 2020), and individuals' psychological state (Martin & Cataneo, 2023). Personal factors can be challenging for a prospective teacher in teaching practicum (Mutalib & Dylan, 2021). As

they have to deal with students' behavior and manage the classroom, they may struggle with the fear of failure and self-doubt (Maharani, 2023). Besides they have to maintain enthusiasm and sustain their passion for teaching throughout the practicum.

Professional factors incorporate educational training (Izadinia, 2016) and teaching skills (Trent, 2023). Teaching practicum is considered the key aspect in the construction of prospective teachers' professional identity (Yuan & Mak, 2016). Teaching Practicum enriches a prospective teacher with pedagogical skills, professional competency, and an opportunity to develop their teaching abilities (Nababan & Amalia, 2021). This is because the major motive of teaching practicum is to provide opportunities to familiarize prospective teachers with the responsibilities of future teaching, construct pedagogical repertoires, and form professional identities (Mockler, 2022). A teaching practicum is defined by the pre-service teacher having live teaching experience and assuming the teacher's role and responsibility over a specified period. Pre-service teachers complete their education and training to be a qualified teacher during a teaching practicum. The pre-service teacher can develop the necessary skills through teaching practicum (Gilani et al., 2020).

The existing literature explores the opportunities for the construction of teachers' professional identity of prospective teachers globally, however, the aim of this research is to explore the opportunities that shape the professional identity of prospective teachers in the context of Pakistan especially in public universities of North Sindh to raise the focus and standard on producing quality teachers. Hence, the literature suggests inquiry into evaluating the opportunities for prospective teachers in the construction of their professional identity.

### **Conceptual Framework**

The social constructivist theory is considered as the theoretical baseline of this study. It was given by a Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky (1896-1934). He considered humans as social beings and claims that learning can neither be considered as a solely personal cognitive process nor be separated from its social context. He believed that all cognitive activities are the product of social interaction. According to Vygotsky (1978, p.57), cultural development of a child occurs twice; initially on the social level between people (inter-psychological) and then on the individual level inside the child (intra-psychological). *"every function in the child's cultural development appears twice: first, on the social level and, later on, on the individual level; first, between people (inter-psychological) and then inside the child (intra-psychological)"*.

On the other hand, cognitive development starts to thrive through social connections in the one of proximal development, where the students interact with more knowledgeable others. According to Vygotsky (1978, p.86) *"ZPD is the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem-solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers"*. The ZPD represents the gap between what a child can do independently and what they can do with assistance. Learning occurs in the ZPD, where a learner can be challenged to reach their potential and acquire new skills and knowledge. The ZPD is not a fixed range, but rather a dynamic zone that changes as a learner's skills and knowledge improve. Vygotsky believed that learning through interaction with more knowledgeable others, such as teachers or peers, is critical for a learner to progress through their ZPD. This interaction can take many forms, such as asking questions, working together on a task, or receiving feedback on performance. The concept of the ZPD has been widely applied in education and has influenced

instructional methods, such as scaffolding, in which a teacher gradually reduces support as a learner becomes more independent. Understanding a student's ZPD can also help teachers to choose appropriate instructional materials and activities that challenge and engage the learner while providing necessary support.

As far as teachers are concerned, Vygotsky's theory would define teacher professional learning as a cultural activity within a social setting, where teachers learn from one another and their trainers or mentors. Vygotsky's concept of the zone of proximal development is based on the idea that development is defined both by what a child can do independently and by what the child can do when assisted by an adult or a more competent peer. The difference between these two levels of performance defines the zone of proximal development. This concept has influenced education and teaching practices and is a basis of cooperative learning. This is also supported by Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, as it emphasizes the importance of social interactions in the development of cognition. Maintaining that culture and development are inseparable, he was able to concentrate on the connections between people and the sociocultural context in which their learning occurs.

The prospective teachers transform their teaching and maintain their professional identity first by indulging them in school-based tasks within the context of practicum schools later on by assisting the cooperative teachers that are more knowledgeable other through co-planning and co-teaching and finally lead to independent teaching (zone of proximal development) is actually the result of interaction with environment and culture of practicum schools, hence, the concept of sociocultural theory considered appropriate for current study.

## **Material and Methods**

### **Research Design**

The research design of this study is qualitative descriptive phenomenology. This study aims to explain the structure, meaning or essence of a specific phenomenon based on their lived experiences. The focus is to gain insights into individuals subjective experiences with the things that already exist, such as relationships and situations, ways of doing things, beliefs, ideas, attitudes, points of view, perceived impacts, and occurrences (Dowling & Cooney, 2012). This research intends to understand the lived experience of prospective teachers by conducting indepth interviews regarding the challenges faced by them during teaching practicum, particularly about the construction of their professional identity. Hence, a descriptive qualitative phenomenological design was deemed suitable as it aligns with the purpose of this research.

### **Research Paradigms**

Ontology is the metaphysical concept of philosophy that believes that whatever exists has its purpose. Otoo (2020) defined ontology as the philosophical research based on existing things and their relation. It focuses on the principles of the social processes being examined and also on the belief in reality (Scotland, 2012). Ontology examines researchers' beliefs about the nature of existence and being. The current study focused on prospective teachers' construction of knowledge about different teaching experiences for establishing their professional identity, therefore lies in the category of constructivist ontology.

Secondly this study followed interpretivist/constructivist epistemology. The philosophy of epistemology concerns the question of how we come to know, what we know (Scotland, 2012). Otoo (2020) defined epistemology as the description of how a person knows about the reality or truth that is considered knowledge. It deals with the nature and forms of knowledge and the justification of how it can be acquired and communicated to others (Locke & Greenberg, 2003). pragmatic approach) (Bryman, 2016; Creswell & Poth, 2016; Dieronitou, 2014). This research study lies in the category of interpretivist/constructivist epistemology because through diverse practicum experiences prospective teachers construct knowledge about teaching on their own.

### **Data Collection Procedure**

Primary data is considered first-hand data. It is collected from any source, mostly through surveys, interviews, case studies, and focused group discussions (Ajayi, 2017). In this study, primary data was collected through semi-structured interview as it enables the researcher to have in-depth knowledge about the lived experiences of participants (Sundler & Palmer, 2019). The interviews were recorded for further process of data analysis.

Primary data is considered first-hand data. It is collected from any source, mostly through surveys, interviews, case studies, and focused group discussions (Ajayi, 2017). In this study, primary data was collected by using interviews followed the semi-structured protocol with eight open-ended questions and probed to get more detailed answers. The tool was face validated by an expert. Most of the interview last for 20 to 25 minutes and recorded. Recordings were transcribed verbatim.

### **Data Analysis Procedure**

The collected data was analyzed by using thematic analysis. The thematic analysis enables the researcher to have a deeper understanding of the patterns of meaning from data on participants' lived experiences related to the research questions. The process of thematic analysis, based on a descriptive phenomenological approach, goes from the original data to the identification of meanings, organizing these into patterns, and writing the results of themes related to the study. The findings were reported and described conversely (Sundler & Palmer, 2019).

The collected data was analyzed by using eight steps by Yüksel and Yıldırım's (2015); 1) horizontalization: after data collection, transcription, and organization every phrase or statement pertaining to phenomenon was listed and valued equally, 2) reduction and elimination: unnecessary data was removed and relevant data to the phenomenon was retained, 3) clustering and thematizing: significant ideas were clustered to form themes, 4) identification of the themes by application: the themes were cross-checked with data until all themes were generated, 5) individual textural description: each transcript was re-read for highlighting the parts relevant to 'what' participants experience, 6) individual structural description: the transcripts were re-read to search 'how' participants experienced the phenomena, 7) textural structural description: the textural and structural meanings were combined to make sense by adding the themes and quotes of the transcription, and 8) composite description: all participants' textural-structural descriptions were synthesized for students' bullying experiences.

## Sampling Method

The sampling procedure aims to get a representative sample for the study (Collins, 2017). The targeted population of this study is the final year students of B. Ed. (Hons.) at The Shaikh Ayaz University Shikarpur, Shah Abdul Latif University Khairpur Mirs, and The Begum Nusrat Bhutto Women University Sukkur because the long-term teaching practicum program is often given in the final year. So, the non-probability purposive sampling technique best suits this study as Campbell et al., (2020) Ritchie and Elam (2003) depict that the logic and power of purposive sampling are based on the selection of information-rich cases for research.

## Sample Size

The reasonable sample size for a phenomenological study may range from 3-20 participants (Cresswell & Poth, 2016). In the current study, two final-year students of B. Ed. (Hons.) from three different public universities of North Sindh i.e. The Shaikh Ayaz University Shikarpur, Shah Abdul Latif University Khairpur Mirs, and The Begum Nusrat Bhutto University Women Sukkur. Total six final year students were the sample of this study. The purpose of the selection of only final year students is because they are the ones who experienced the long-term teaching practicum course in last year of B.Ed. degree program. Participants were selected from three different universities focus on diversity and capture the variance in the lived experiences of prospective teachers.

## Ethical Considerations

The respondents of the study were informed about the motive of the research and their consent was taken before collection of data. They were ensured that the collected data will only be used for the research study and the researcher guaranteed that the identity of the respondents will be confidential and that anonymity will be ensured (Bhandari, 2023).

## Results and Discussion

The purpose of this study was to explore the challenges and opportunities in constructing the professional identities of prospective teachers based on the lived experiences. The data analysis framework of Yüksel and Yıldırım (2015) was employed along with frequencies of occurrence for exploring the challenges in teaching practicum. The analyzed data generated two major themes with seven subthemes:

### Challenges in teaching practicum

According to data obtained from the prospective teachers based on their lived experiences, several challenges were encountered by them i.e. overcrowded classrooms, multigrade teaching, classroom management and poor infrastructure.

#### Overcrowded classrooms

According to the lived experiences of prospective teachers, the problem of overcrowded classrooms persists during their real classroom teaching as three participants said:

*The overcrowded classroom was very difficult for me to handle properly. I believe that a single teacher can either manage the classroom discipline or provide quality education, because working on both at the same time is a highly challenging task. (P2)*

*The major challenge that I encountered was to manage the overcrowded classroom. The strength was so high that I was unable to maintain the discipline among students, and because of this I asked my peer to assist teaching with me on the very next day. (P3)*

*I was unable to implement my planned activities due to the overcrowded classroom. I couldn't even arrange them in seats, as the students were more than available benches, they continuously complained about each other rather than focusing on the studies. (P6)*

According to P2 and P3 overcrowding caused a noisy classroom environment; reduced interaction with students; affected overall discipline; and disturbed classroom management. Additionally, P6 had pointed out the lack of proper implementation of planned lesson because of overcrowded class the teacher is unable to give individual attention to the students.

### **Multigrade teaching**

The multigrade teaching refers to the teaching of different grades and ages in one classroom. Multigrade teaching system is adopted in the context of majority of the government schools. The prospective teachers also experience multigrade teaching and found it challenging as P5 commented:

*I planned a lesson of English for 6<sup>th</sup> grade, as I enter the class, I saw almost 100+ students sitting in the same class. I inquired which class is this? Some students replied that it's 6<sup>th</sup> grade, some answered 7<sup>th</sup> grade and few responded that it's 8<sup>th</sup> grade. At that moment I was perplexed because I was only prepared for 6<sup>th</sup> grade students. I thought that if I would conduct this class, it would be much easier for 7<sup>th</sup> grade students and easiest for 8<sup>th</sup> graders as they are already in higher grades. Additionally, this multigrade teaching doesn't only influence my first session, but remains a huge obstacle during whole teaching practice. (P5)*

According to P5 multigrade teaching is a situation where a teacher is responsible to teach more than single standard students in same credit hour. Majority students faced difficulties to learn in a mixed age setting due to their changed ability and maturity levels and individual differences. It was challenging for teachers to incorporate appropriate content and plan the lesson effectively.

### **Classroom Management**

As per the respondents, the students' active engagement was the crucial element for classroom management.

*In the real classroom, besides teaching, managing the classroom was a significant struggle. Meeting the students' expectations to involve them in activities required careful lesson planning. It was essential to maintain the students' interest and attention to ensure they remained equally engaged, and their participation was a constant challenge for me. (P2)*

*In my first session I was very confused about managing the classroom. I realized that engaging students in activities and effective classroom management are the key elements to maintain class discipline. I realized that one can only find the gap when they practice teaching in real context. (P6)*

According to P2, classroom management depends on active engagement of students. P6 was of the same view that students' involvement led disciplined environment and acknowledged it as crucial element for classroom management.



### Poor Infrastructure

The quality of school infrastructure influences the teaching learning process. Improving school infrastructure enhanced the learning environment and ultimately leads to achieve the educational outcomes in a broad sense. The respondents exhibited their experiences as below:

*The overall environment was just adjustable, as I was asked by my supervisor to teach science and computer subjects, I feel the need of science and computer labs where I can practically involve my students for better understanding of topics, this will improve my way of teaching. (P1)*

*The building was so old and lacks the basic facilities like there was not any proper system of clean water and washrooms. Above all the school lacks a reliable electricity system, there was dire need of lights in classrooms, and it was too dark which negatively impacts students' learning. (P4)*

*The school was fine, but it lacks the facilities as per the enrollment of students which hinders the teaching learning process. There was shortage of basic facilities, most surprisingly student's ratio was greater than the available seats in classroom. So, it was difficult for a teacher to teach effectively in such an environment. (P5)*

P1 emphasized creating classroom for interactive learning, provide infrastructure that enable the teachers to integrate new technologies, P4 highlighted several factors such as proper illumination in classroom helped to maintain quality of education. P6 portrayed that the provision of basic facilities like clean water for drinking and availability of hygienic washroom influence positively on teaching-learning activity.

### *Locating the challenges in development of professional identity of prospective teachers*

After discussing the challenges faced by prospective teachers, the researcher discussed whether these challenges helped to shape the professional identity of the prospective teachers or not. According to data prospective teachers locate the challenges in development of professional identity as gaining confidence in new role, strengthen teaching skills, and problem-solving techniques.

### Gaining confidence in new role

At the end of the teaching practicum the prospective teachers had obtained more practical experience that made them more confident and competent in their new roles. As three participants shared their views:

*At the completion of my teaching practicum course, I self-evaluate by comparing my first teaching experience with the last session. I was very confused in the first session whereas in last session I felt myself more confident with polished skills. Now, I can claim with certainty that I have a diversity of ideas to engage students in different activities and can manage the classroom well. (P1)*

*It was my aim to be a teacher. I believe that teaching is a rewarding profession, where one can make a positive impact on students' lives. I always wanted to inspire, guide, and help my students grow academically and personally. This course gives the very first opportunity to experience real classroom teaching. This boosts my confidence level and makes me intrinsically happy to be called a teacher. (P2)*

*The teaching practicum course exposes me to real-world classroom situations, which helps me develop my teaching style and strategies. It allows me to face various challenges, such as managing diverse student needs or adapting lesson plans on the spot. Through these experiences, I gain confidence, and a deeper understanding of my strengths and areas for growth. It's all part of shaping my professional identity as an educator. (P5)*

As P1 and P5 explained that teaching practicum courses help them to uplift their confidence and empowers them to gain more practical experience which made them feel more competent in their new duties. Whereas P2 highlighted the importance and his keen passion towards the teaching profession.

### **Strengthen teaching skills**

Teaching practicum course aims to focus on the development of specific teaching skills that are important for effective teaching. At the end of this course prospective teachers get experienced of different skills like effective lesson planning, managerial skills, and various teaching approaches that increase their confidence. As four participants commented:

*Teaching practicum course is very helpful for us to develop teaching skills. As in this course we go through the whole teaching process, from lesson planning to its implementation. This enables us to plan and adopt different methods of teaching and use various types of assessment process in real classroom settings. (P1)*

*I believe that this course helps me to develop effective teaching skills such as lesson planning, classroom management, time management, adaptability, teamwork, different methodologies, and assessment techniques which supports to cover the gap between theory and practice and helps me strengthen my professional conduct. (P4)*

*Real classroom teaching in practicum course enhances my teaching skills specially I learnt about planning and implementation of exciting lesson plans that capture the attention of students and make learning fun. In addition to this it also helps me to use different teaching tactics to meet the unique needs student, ensuring that everyone can successfully understand the topic. (P5)*

*I think that the teaching practicum course is incredibly helpful for me in developing my teaching skills. It provides a hands-on experience where I can apply what I have learned in the classroom and gain practical teaching experience. It's a valuable opportunity to observe experienced teachers, receive feedback, and reflect on my own teaching sessions. (P6)*

Learning to teach is like learning to play a musical instrument. It must be learned and mastered. All above mentioned views of prospective teacher focus on the learning of skills and knowledge which are basic to achieving the goals of education. The prospective teachers should not only theoretically learn these skills, but also acquire and demonstrate them in the real classroom. Additionally, P3 believe this course as backbone of the B.Ed. degree and said that *No doubt, teaching practicum course is the backbone of this degree program. This enables us to learn about different pedagogies and cultivate our teaching style.*

### **Problem Solving Approaches**

Problem solving is a central activity for prospective teachers to independently construct a deep understanding and appreciation of teaching learning process. Two of the participants shared:

*I encountered different problems in this course such as working with set criteria of school administration, dealing with different people, lesson planning, students' behavior, using different methodologies, and maintaining formal documentation and records. Dealing with all above mentioned minor problems this course allows me to strengthen my problem-solving skills. (P2)*

*I learnt a lot of skills by facing different challenges during this course, specifically I acquired the problem-solving skill. While facing different sudden scenarios I learnt to go with the alternate choices. Once I planned an activity based on integration of technology but on that day, school was out of electricity, so I had to change the activity at that moment. Such situations make me tackle different issues and strengthen my problem-solving skills. (P4)*

P2 and P4 realizes that teaching profession is not easy, prospective teachers face more problems in different aspects that hinder the teaching learning process. When they deal with those issues with various strategies during teaching practicum they strengthen their problem-solving skills.

### **Integration of new perspectives**

After experiencing teaching with different methodologies using various activities, prospective teachers get innovative ideas to perform ice breaking activities to gauge the attention of students. As P3 shared:

*To manage my classroom and students effectively, I established clear rules, treating the class like a game where everyone must follow the rules. Whenever I encountered a disturbance, I used a call-and-response technique: I would say, "One, two, eyes on me," and the students would reply, "One, two, eyes on you," to regain their attention. For me, managing the class isn't about controlling behavior but ensuring students understand instructions and minimizing unwanted disturbances. I also incorporate engaging activities to keep students focused and involved throughout the entire lecture. P3*

P3 experienced that when students get distracted during lecture, a teacher must adopt some innovative ways to divert their attention so that they get back towards learning process.

### **Discussion**

In this phenomenological research, the challenges faced by prospective teachers and construction of their professional identity was explored. Through semi-structured interviews, the lived experiences of six participants from three different universities of North Sindh were documented, and two major themes emerged with four subthemes each. The first finding informed about the challenges faced by prospective teachers during their teaching practicum course. Overcrowded classroom was the very first challenge highlighted by prospective teachers. The study conducted by Zaman et al. (2023) supports that higher the number of students, the more problems the teacher is likely to face. The second challenge found in current study was multigrade teaching that affects the teaching process of prospective teachers. This was supported by Dulana et al. (2023) that working with children of different levels in a multi-grade class setup is difficult that places greater demands on the teacher, including the need for different types of learning materials and teaching aids. This can create a feeling of frustration among both students and teachers. The next finding of current study was classroom management and most of the prospective teachers do not know how to do classroom activities that help them manage the classroom. The same results were found by Gan (2022) that classroom management is a major challenge in teaching practicum where prospective teachers struggle to keep the classrooms in conducive environment. Poor

infrastructure was also a hindrance for prospective teachers as many of the schools do not even have the basic facilities. Ahmed (2021) study supports this finding that lack of basic resources and inadequate furniture cannot provide a proper classroom environment and creates difficulties in ensuring a suitable school atmosphere for learning as well as for teaching.

After facing many challenges prospective teachers transform their professional identity. According to the data the second theme emergers from the lived experiences of prospective teachers was locating the challenges in development of their professional identity. At first, they gain confidence in their new role as teacher. This finding is supported by Zhu et al., (2022) that prospective teachers had greater practical expertise at the end of the teaching practicum, which led to their increased confidence in taking on new tasks. Along with confidence they are empowered with teaching skills. As results of the study by Scott et al. (2014) depicted that teaching practicum has been acknowledged as an essential and meaningful course that provides a platform for prospective teachers to experience real classroom teaching which strengthens teaching skills of prospective teachers. Additionally, after carrying out teaching practicum, it is hoped that prospective teachers will be independent and become professional teachers in the future. To reach this level they encounter different problems and solve them on their our (Khalid et al., 2020) this led a prospective teacher to be rich with different problem-solving approaches. Another finding in the development of professional identity was integration of new perspectives by prospective teachers to motivate students towards learning. Maharani and Fithriani (2023) study support this finding that adopting different techniques and tactics enhances students' engagement towards learning which makes teaching effective.

## Conclusions

The study focused on exploring the challenges faced by prospective teachers and its imprint on developing of their professional identity. The experiences of six prospective teachers were studies. In this study the phenomenological strategy was used to draw descriptive themes. Using eights steps of Yuksel and Yildirim (2015), two themes with eight sub themes emergers. The first theme was the challenges in teaching practicum with four sub themes a) Overcrowded classrooms, b) Multigrade teaching, c) Classroom Management, d) Poor Infrastructure. The second theme was locating the challenges in development of professional identity with four sub themes a) Gaining confidence in new role, b) Strengthen teaching skills, c) Problem solving approach, and d) Integration of new perspective. The findings indicated that prospective teachers had faced several challenges, and those challenges helps them in construction of their professional identity. This study shows that prospective teachers can develop their professional identity while coping with different challenges and gain confidence to call themselves professional teachers. This is meant to get qualified future teachers ready for their jobs. The generalization of the research may be questioned because of the limited contextual scope. The focus of this research was to gain a rich and in-depth understanding of the context related to the main issues discussed.

## Recommendations

The study recommend that future research can be conducted on different samples, different context with different methodology. Study based on examination and comparison of the challenges encountered by prospective teachers teaching practice at the secondary and primary school levels have the potential to yield important insights for the design of university practice. To elucidate the specifics of the actual practical procedures, observations are required. Other aspects of practicum, such as dealing with

administrators at partner schools, faculty supervisors, and supervisor teachers, appear to be crucial to getting to the bottom of the issues. In addition, policy formulation based on the current requirements of prospective teachers would benefit from cooperation with existing institutions in North Sindh about the most effective means of addressing the issues prospective teachers experience.

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