Australian Journal of Teacher Education

Volume 47 | Issue 2 Article 1

2022

An Examination on Views on Teaching Practicum Held by Associate Teachers: A Qualitative Case Study

Gülten Koşar
Hatay Mustafa Kemal University

An Examination on Views on Teaching Practicum Held by Associate Teachers: A Qualitative Case Study

Gülten Koşar
Hatay Mustafa Kemal University, Turkey

Abstract: Seeing the significance of exploring associate teachers' views about teaching practicum, this qualitative case study aims to seek answers to the questions of what the self-perceived roles of four Turkish associate teachers in teaching practicum are and what their perceptions concerning the adequacy of the length of teaching practicum in Turkey are. Additionally, the present research targets finding answers to the questions of whether teaching practicum contributed to the professional development of the last trainee teachers the associate teachers have mentored and if mentoring fosters their own professional development. The results indicated they considered offering professional and emotional support to trainee teachers as their pivotal roles in teaching practicum and the length of teaching practicum as insufficient. The findings also demonstrated that the associate teachers believed teaching practicum substantially contributed to the professional development of the last trainee teachers they had mentored and mentoring enhanced their own professional development.

Introduction

Pre-service teacher education, of which teaching practicum is a crucial component, occupies a vital place in trainee teachers' (TTs) learning (Vries et al., 2015), and its quality is a parameter exerting profound influence on their desire to enter and stay in the profession (Moses et al., 2017). Associate teachers (ATs) (refers to practicing teachers mentoring TTs in teaching practicum) take on a leading role in the transition of TTs from on-campus learning to learning what it means to be a teacher in real classes (Black et al., 2016; Ramsaroop & Gravett, 2017). Ambrosetti and Dekkers (2010) maintain literature encapsulates diverse definitions of mentoring due to the variations in how it is viewed and define it as:

> *Mentoring is a non-hierarchical, reciprocal relationship between mentors and mentees who work towards specific professional and personal outcomes for the mentee. The relationship usually follows a developmental pattern within a specified time frame and roles are defined, expectations are outlined and a purpose is (ideally) clearly delineated* (p.52).

Literature review on teaching practicum has unfolded that it has not been examined in a wide range of studies from ATs' points of view (e.g., Altan & Sağlamel, 2015; Beck & Kosnik, 2000) as against the number of research on exploring it through the lens of TTs (e.g., Allen & Wright, 2014; Choy et al., 2014; Jones & Ryan, 2014; Yan & He, 2010). Therefore, the present study is likely to contribute to expanding the literature on ATs' conceptions of teaching practicum by investigating four Turkish ATs' viewpoints on it in detail. The

findings to be presented in this paper could prompt policy makers to take initiatives for making changes in how teaching practicum is executed to maximize its positive effect on not only TT but also AT professional learning.

The Role of ATs in Teaching Practicum

ATs need to be clear about the roles they are to play in teaching practicum because, as has been maintained by Clarke et al. (2014), confusion about what is expected of them may jeopardize lending quality support to TTs. The common findings in the studies undertaken to explore the role of ATs in teaching practicum revealed that ATs provided support, feedback and guidance to TTs (Beck & Kosnik, 2000; Chien, 2015). The diverse roles to be adopted by ATs were examined in the study conducted by Davis and Fantozzi (2016). The results showed that the TTs wanted their ATs to fulfil three roles: "mentor as emotional support", "mentor as instructional coach" and "mentor as gatekeeper" (pp. 257-260). Similarly, the roles of ATs were reported to be "mentors as instructional coaches", "emotional support system" and "socializing agent" in Butler and Cuenca's (2012, p. 296) paper. Another role of ATs has been identified as strengthening TTs' motivation through the medium of underscoring their strengths while mitigating the ways of expressing their weaknesses (Lin et al., 2019). Fulfilling the self-perceived needs of TTs, comprehending their theoretical perspectives, becoming friends with them, providing support to them and evaluating their teaching practices were yielded to be the roles of ATs in the study carried out by Li (2009).

With a view to performing their roles in teaching practicum, ATs need to possess a set of skills. Black et al. (2016) deemed patience, strong communication skills, teaching expertise and developing a positive relationship with TTs as the skills fundamental for effective mentorship. The researchers also pointed out the requirement for training ATs in how to be a good mentor. Additionally, ATs' willingness to supervise TTs could serve an essential function in duly performing their duties. Providing ATs are emotionally committed to their duty of mentoring, they might put more considerable and sustained effort into mentoring TTs (Sandik et al., 2019). Remarkable in the findings of the studies on the role of ATs in teaching practicum is the probability of undermining the independence of TTs by making them do what ATs want them to do (Beck & Kosnik, 2000). TTs' recommendations for ameliorating the effectiveness of teaching practicum are, thus, related to having more independence of lesson planning though they abstain from undervaluing the support and guidance offered by ATs (Fazio & Volante, 2011).

Perceptions of ATs regarding their roles in teaching practicum are examined in a number of research. For instance, the one conducted by Hall et al., (2008) revealed that "emotional and professional support to TTs, critical evaluation and team teaching and collaboration" (p. 335) were amongst the self-perceived roles of the participating ATs. The participants were asked to range their roles from the most significant to the least significant in that study as well. "Modelling/demonstrations" and "providing critical feedback" were chosen as the first two most important roles of ATs. In the research carried out by Izadinia (2015), it was revealed that there was congruence between what the ATs considered their responsibilities were for mentoring the TTs and how the TTs evaluated the ATs' performance in teaching practicum. The TTs perceived their ATs as mentors supporting them, giving feedback to them and engaging in effective communication with them.

Conversation between TTs and ATs has a prominent role in supporting TTs' understandings of the teaching profession, characteristics of good teachers, the development of their teacher identities (Sheridan & Young, 2016; Tillema et al., 2011). Responsive mediation, whereby TTs appropriate what they learn by interacting with ATs and commence

to function independently, is suggested as a medium for promoting TT learning (Yoon & Kim, 2019). Building up a positive relationship with TTs in teaching practicum is construed to be crucial for assisting TTs in improving their teaching practices (Chien, 2015; Graves, 2010; Hudson, 2016). The readiness of ATs for mentoring is also of high significance for TTs to make the most of teaching practicum. To illustrate, in the research conducted by Grundnoff (2011), it was revealed that practicum experiences were insufficient in preparing TTs for the first year of teaching. Therefore, it was suggested to reorganize practicum by letting TTs start school-based experience at the beginning of the school year rather than the school term. However, it was pointed out that could be accomplished only if ATs were willing to work with TTs at the beginning of the school year, which necessitates the careful selection of ATs (Tshuma & Ndebele, 2015).

One of the duties of ATs in teaching practicum is making decisions about TTs' readiness for beginning to teach. Nevertheless, in place of grounding the decisions upon standardized criteria, ATs might resort to their experiences, resulting in incongruence between the decisions they make (Ell & Haigh, 2014). For this reason, ATs' knowledge base of mentoring needs to be extended through taking into account their knowledge of TT learning. The study done by Ginkel et al. (2018) aimed at investigating how ATs viewed the differences and similarities between the novice teachers they had mentored. Two reported differences were linked with the differences in the novice teachers' "personal engagement with pupils" and "perfectionism and self-confidence". The research done by Altan and Sağlam (2015) on how ATs evaluated TT performance in teaching practicum yielded both negative and positive points. The positive ones involved exchanging ideas with ATs related to teaching, using a variety of materials in the classroom, increased level of student motivation and contribution of TTs to the professional development of ATs. The negative ones included TTs' not being skilled in classroom management and their uneasiness with the possibility of not fulfilling the requirements for following the curriculum.

Studies on ATs reveal that they are unsure about what is expected of them in teaching practicum and how to supervise TTs. Grimmett et. al. (2018, p.340) revealed in their study that repositioning ATs as "fellow teacher educators" helped them boost their self-confidence in contributing to the professional development of TTs. Development in mentoring skills could be realized by merging research-based knowledge and the knowledge rooted in ATs' experiences of mentoring (Tang & Choi, 2005). This means that ATs' professional knowledge of mentoring might be broadened though bridging the gap between theory and practice. The need for continuing AT professional development to help them be clear about their responsibilities in teaching practicum and to boost the quality of their mentoring is accentuated in the literature (Mtika, 2011; Turnbull, 2005).

The Contribution of Mentoring to ATs' Professional Development

Teaching practicum performs a crucial function as a joint learning environment where TTs in collaboration with ATs can find a chance to transfer the pedagogical content knowledge they acquire on campus into practice. Accordingly, they can get prepared for dealing with the complexities of real teaching. Nevertheless, it is not only TTs developing professionally in teaching practicum but also ATs. A number of research has yielded that ATs can also derive substantial benefit from mentoring such as catching up with new teaching practices and uncovering their pedagogical knowledge as providing feedback to TTs (e.g., Hudson, 2013; Jaipal, 2009; Margolis, 2007; Mukeredzi, 2017; Wang & Ha, 2012).

Seeing the absence of research extensively investigating ATs' views about teaching practicum, this research aims at broadening the existing body of knowledge on ATs'

viewpoints on teaching practicum through finding answers to the following research questions:

1- What are the self-perceived roles of ATs in teaching practicum?
2- What are the perceptions of ATs regarding the sufficiency of the length of teaching practicum for preparing TTs for real teaching?
3- What are the perceptions of ATs of the effectiveness of teaching practicum in the professional development of the last TTs they have supervised?
4- What are the perceptions of ATs with respect to the contribution of supervising TTs to their own professional development?

Methodology

Research Design and the Setting

This research is designed as a qualitative case study as it concerns a detailed exploration of the perceptions of the participating ATs regarding teaching practicum, and as is purported by Pandey and Patnaik (2014), in qualitative research, "the researcher builds a complex, holistic picture, analyses words, reports detailed views of informants" (p. 5745). In Turkey, where the present research is conducted, TTs are to do their teaching practicum in the last year of pre-service teacher education programs, lasting for four years. As a course requirement, TTs are placed in a state-run primary (grades 1-4), secondary (grades 5-8) or upper secondary school (grades 9-12). TTs are to teach at least four lessons in 14 weeks, indicating the duration of the spring term of the last academic year during which they do their teaching practicum. TTs are to go to their placement schools at least once per week. The lessons taught by TTs are observed and evaluated both by ATs and university supervisors. Prior to beginning to teach, TTs are expected to observe their ATs' classroom practices to gain an overview of how they conduct teaching. Moreover, teaching practicum acts like a learning environment where TTs learn about the operation of the school system and what duties other than teaching ATs meet at school. In the context of this research, only teachers having attended training in mentoring TTs before, offered by Ministry of National Education, can be allocated as ATs by school principals (Ministry of National Education, 2018). The training aims to equip ATs with the skills and knowledge of mentoring TTs effectively, including how to offer feedback to them on their teaching practices and carry out the evaluation process. That is, ATs do not mentor TTs on a voluntary basis.

Participants

Convenience sampling was used to select the participants of the study. They were four female ATs teaching at a state-run upper-secondary school and collaborating with the researcher on supervising eight trainee English-as-a-foreign-language teachers.

The ATs ranged in age from 35 to 55. The ATs' years of teaching experience showed a variation between 12 and 32 years. Three ATs held a BA degree in English language teaching whereas one had a BA and an MA degree in English language and literature when this research was conducted. The AT having the most mentoring experience had been supervising TTs for 13 years whilst the AT with the least supervising experience had been mentoring TTs for two years. All the participants were assigned to mentor the TTs by the principal without being asked if they were willing to supervise them. Two trainee English-as-a-foreign-language teachers were supervised by one AT. The ATs had participated in training in how to mentor TTs once before. At the end of the teaching practicum lasting for 14 weeks,

the ATs were informed about the purpose of the study and their consent to take part in this study was obtained. Information on the participating ATs that could reveal their identity will not be shared throughout the research to maintain anonymity and confidentiality.

Data Collection and Analysis

The data were collected by conducting an in-depth interview with the participants to find out answers to the research questions. The interview questions were as follows:

1- Tell me your perceptions of the role/s an AT plays in teaching practicum.
2- Tell me what you think about the adequacy of the length of teaching practicum for preparing TTs for the teaching profession.
3- Tell me your ideas about the effectiveness of teaching practicum in the professional development of the last TTs you have mentored.
4- Tell me your ideas if mentoring has contributed to your own professional development. Please give some concrete details.

Each recorded interview lasted between 35-40 minutes and was transcribed verbatim. Inductive content analysis was conducted by two coders in an effort to analyse the gathered data. Categories were collated from codes, and then, grouped into themes. Peer debriefing was used with a view to unfolding the researcher's bias against the data and analysis, which aided in establishing the credibility of the research, as is suggested by Lincoln and Guba (1985). Aside from peer debriefing, the transcribed interviews were shared with the ATs to ascertain the transcriptions mirrored what they had in their minds, and the findings were also presented to them in an effort to ensure the findings reflected what they intended to state (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 1995).

Findings

The findings demonstrated that the ATs believed they fulfilled a number of roles in teaching practicum, whose length should be increased. The findings also revealed the ATs' strongly-held beliefs in the significant contribution of the teaching practicum to the last TTs they had supervised and to a large extent in its invaluable contribution to their own professional learning. Succeeding paragraphs involve the detailed findings as to the research questions.

ATs' Self-Perceived Roles in Teaching Practicum

The analysis of the data revealed the ATs had similar perceptions regarding their roles in teaching practicum. They believed that their major role in teaching practicum was providing *professional support to TTs*, which is one of the two themes developed in the content analysis. *Emotionally supporting TTs* was the other theme produced from the analysis.

Providing Professional Support

The ATs stated during the interview that the most significant role they performed in teaching practicum was supporting TTs in gaining experience in teaching English through getting TTs to observe their instructional practices and to practice teaching. The ATs also highlighted the significance of providing supportive and critical feedback to TTs following

their teaching practices. Moreover, they emphasized the importance of giving TTs as many chances as possible to put what they had learned at university into practice and to experience what happened in real classrooms.

> *I believe that we, as ATs, should try to help TTs experience what happens in the real world. Because what is taught at university may not be put into practice when the teacher teaches in the classroom. I mean, I personally experienced the same thing, too. But in teaching practicum, TTs firstly observe us and students, and then, practice teaching. We observe their teaching, evaluate their performance and give feedback about their strengths and weaknesses in teaching. TTs sometimes ask us questions about the techniques we employ in lessons and we have conversations with them about why we do what we do*. (AT 3)

> *I think I help TTs learn about what it means to be a teacher when they are doing their practicum. They practice teaching in practicum and learn to manage the classroom, give feedback to students, plan interesting lessons and how to assess students. They may learn about these issues theoretically at university, yet they experience what happens in real teaching once they start to do their practicum*. (AT 1)

Offering Emotional Support

The ATs articulated in the interviews that the TTs they had mentored were in need of emotional support regardless of how self-motivated they were on the grounds that they occasionally felt helpless to manage the classroom and correct the mistakes made by students without discouraging and demotivating them. The ATs also stressed the importance of carrying on friendly conversations with TTs to encourage them in their long and difficult journey of being a teacher.

> *I think my major role in mentoring is providing emotional support to TTs. I remember TTs asking for help with strategies they can use in classroom management and in using their voice effectively. When I was doing my own practicum, I experienced similar problems and needed my AT's support; therefore, I really understand how they feel in the classroom. Actually, what they need is hearing that they will learn to overcome such problems and be successful teachers. I mean they need to be motivated and I believe this is my most important role in practicum.* (AT 4)

In the same vein, AT 2 expressed:

> *I believe that teaching practicum is the most important part of pre-service teacher education. Pre-service teachers may either look forward to starting to teach or hate teaching depending on their practicum experiences. I think the most important thing I do as supervising TTs is supporting them emotionally and telling them that they will learn to overcome problems.*

Perceptions of the ATs of the Sufficiency of the Length of Teaching Practicum

The ATs thought that 14-week-teaching practicum, one day per week, was inadequate for preparing TTs for the complexities of real teaching inasmuch as TTs were supposed to learn about the operation of school system, observe students and their ATs and teach four

times in this limited time frame. For this reason, they all believed that the length of teaching practicum was to be increased to aid TTs in getting prepared for the teaching profession.

> *I believe that the length of practicum is really insufficient and should be increased. Can you tell me how 14 weeks could be adequate for preparing TTs for teaching? How can a TT learn what being a good teacher requires in 14 weeks? I believe that they need to begin to do their practicum at the beginning of the 3rd year of study so that they can spend more time in schools and gain more experience of what happens at schools, and what should be done to make teaching effective for students*. (AT 2)
>
> *I don't think the length of teaching practicum is sufficient. I believe that a TT needs to spend one whole year at a primary school, a term at a secondary school and another term at an upper secondary school. One day in each week for 14 weeks is not enough for TTs. I am sure about that because when I was a TT, I had a similar teaching practicum experience in terms of its length, and at those times, I had the same opinion about the inadequacy its length*. (AT 4)

Contribution of Teaching Practicum to the Professional Development of the Last TTs the ATs Had Mentored

The ATs highlighted in the interview that teaching practicum contributed a lot to the last TTs they had mentored. The content analysis revealed that the major areas in which the TTs developed professionally included classroom management, building self-confidence in their teaching skills, effective time management, preparing supplementary materials for students and lesson planning.

> *On the first day of the practicum, X was anxious and did not know how to address students. He could not arrange the tone of his voice, and because of this, the students sitting at the back row could not hear him and shouted "Teacher, we can't hear you". Moreover, he was not self-confident, but at the end of practicum, he learned how to address students in the classroom and how to use his voice as a teaching tool due to practicing teaching and observing me teaching*. (AT 3)
>
> *Y was totally a different TT at the end of the practicum. She had no idea about when a teacher needs to use supplementary materials, how to prepare them, when to use them and how to adapt them, but after working with me, she has learnt about how to prepare and use them*. (AT 2)

Contribution of Mentoring TTs to the ATs' Own Professional Development

Other than one AT, the other three ATs stated that mentoring significantly contributed to their professional development. The AT who did not believe that mentoring TTs enhanced her professional development expressed in the interview that she had been teaching for a long time; thus, mentoring did not contribute to her own professional development. The analysis of the responses of the three ATs stating that mentoring helped them improve themselves professionally led to the development of the themes of *prompting ATs to apply different language teaching methods* and *encouraging ATs to evaluate their own teaching with a critical eye*. The ATs pointed out in their expressions that they had a chance to review language teaching methods. They observed TTs implementing them in their teaching, and then, felt an overwhelming desire to apply them in their own instructional practices as well for they realized that they were effective in teaching English.

Prompting ATs to Apply Different Language Teaching Methods

The ATs who had learnt a lot from mentoring TTs pointed out that even though they had had a vast amount of experience in teaching, a desire stirred inside them to implement the methods and techniques used by TTs after witnessing that they had been useful in teaching English to students. They underscored in the interview that they knew the methods used by TTs, however, had not implemented them in their teaching practices.

> *A TT taught a lesson in which she used suggestopedia and it was really effective. Of course, I know that playing music in the classroom could establish a comfortable environment for students, and I also know what suggestopedia is but I haven't given it a try in my teaching so far and I really do not know why I haven't applied it but the thing I know is that I will implement it in my lessons next year, too. Observing TTs' teaching practices is kind of refreshment for me*. (AT 2)

Encouraging ATs to Evaluate Their Own Teaching with a Critical Eye

The ATs articulated that evaluating TT teaching led them to critique their own teaching practices as well. They stated that they had engaged in evaluating their instructional practices occasionally before; they had not, nonetheless, critically reflected on them. Evaluating TT teaching practices helped the ATs critically reflect on their own teaching. Additionally, the ATs emphasized that they had conversations with TTs, though not on a regular basis, regarding their own classroom practices and TTs commented on their teaching performance.

> *I think mentoring TTs helped me develop myself professionally because I began to evaluate my teaching, I can say, thoroughly after starting to mentor them. I have become more aware of my weaknesses in teaching English and have been trying to improve myself. For example, one day, a TT told me that my students did not respond my questions because they could not understand them and recommended that I should use simpler words in my questions. As of that day, I have taken into account his suggestion and realized that using simpler words in questions has been really working. I mean I have seen that my students can answer my questions*. (AT 1)
>
> AT 2 stated: "*Mentoring is a way of learning for me. I learn what to do and what not to do when observing TTs teaching. Also, I have an idea about in which areas I need to improve myself professionally*."

Discussion

The ATs participating in the present study viewed providing TTs professional and emotional support as their major roles in teaching practicum. The explanations they verbalized as to enhancing professional development of TTs in teaching practicum involved giving feedback to them on their teaching performance and aiding them in preparing lesson plans and supplementary materials. The perceptions of the ATs in regard to their roles are in agreement with the related research in the literature (e.g., Beck & Kosnik, 2000; Chien, 2015; Davis & Fantozzi, 2016; Hall et al., 2008; Li, 2009; Lin et al., 2019). Providing feedback to TTs is highly significant for their professional development as they can raise their awareness of their own weaknesses and strengths in their instructional practices and attempt to

strengthen the identified weaknesses in light of the offered feedback. Therefore, it is encouraging to read about the viewpoints of the ATs acknowledging the value of offering constructive feedback to TTs. Nevertheless, considering the existence of ATs not offering as much feedback as anticipated and needed by TTs, ATs may need to be trained on the profound significance of giving feedback to TTs and how to give useful feedback to them.

In addition to professional support to TTs, the other major role of ATs, according to the participants, is providing emotional support to TTs. In other words, the participants purported that motivating TTs specifically at times when they felt stuck in being able to teach English and manage the classroom effectively was one of their pivotal roles. Likewise, the studies by Davis and Fantozzi (2016) and Butler and Cuenca (2012) reported providing emotional support as one of the roles of ATs. Offering emotional support necessitates establishing a strong relationship with TTs, as is stated in the research undertaken by Black et al. (2016). Emotional commitment to mentoring (Sandik et al., 2019) also has a crucial place in ATs' willingness to provide emotional support to TTs. For this reason, ATs who are selected to supervise TTs merely due to their availability may not put considerable and sustained effort into providing emotional and professional support to TTs. The training to be organized for equipping ATs with the knowledge and skills they are likely to use as mentoring TTs thereupon could be considered to be the medium for accentuating the importance of offering emotional support to TTs.

The findings as to the ATs' conceptions of the sufficiency of the length of teaching practicum showed that the ATs did not think a single day each week in 14 weeks was adequate in preparing TTs for the first year of teaching. TTs might feel ready for beginning to teach if teaching practicum is initiated in the earlier terms in the pre-service teacher education program and its length is increased. In doing so, they can gain more experience not only in teaching but also in observing teaching practices of more than one AT teaching students at different levels. Moreover, TTs may acquire and develop the skills they are highly likely to utilize in the forthcoming years in the teaching profession. It is noteworthy that TTs need to gain teaching experience at primary, secondary and upper secondary schools in that they may work at all levels of education in their professional lives.

The findings in the present study with regard to the ATs*'* perceptions of the contribution of teaching practicum to the professional development of the last TTs they had mentored revealed that they observed the progress in their teaching performance. To illustrate, the ATs witnessed improvements in the TTs' classroom and time management skills. The findings are in line with the research carried out to date to investigate the professional development of TTs in teaching practicum (Choy et al., 2014; Cohen et al., 2013). The ATs in this study also stated in the interview that the TTs gained experience in lesson planning and complementing their teaching with supplementary materials. The progress the ATs observed in the TTs' classroom practices exhibits the effectiveness of teaching practicum in the professional development of the TTs, who could have gained those experiences in the microteaching they conducted at university to a limited extent. However, practicing teaching in a real classroom environment could create long-lasting effects on TT professional learning.

The results also indicated that three participating ATs conceived that mentoring TTs helped them enhance their own professional development. Observing TTs' instructional practices prompted the ATs to integrate the language teaching techniques they viewed as effective into their teaching. Moreover, the ATs deemed evaluating their own teaching with a critical eye as another contribution of mentoring TTs to their own professional development, which parallels the research in the related literature (Hudson, 2013; Wang & Ha, 2012). Given the fact that teaching practicum is an environment in which joint learning takes place,

mentoring TTs brings substantial benefits to two significant stakeholders of teaching practicum: TTs and ATs.

Conclusion

Teaching practicum might be regarded to be a platform from which not only TTs but also ATs could reap considerable benefits for enhancing their professional learning. Observing, evaluating and providing feedback on TTs' instructional practices may lead ATs to refresh and enhance their own pedagogical content knowledge. Hence, gaining knowledge of ATs' viewpoints on their teaching practicum experiences could open a window into what to do to improve the quality of teaching practicum for both TTs and them. For this reason, the present study reported on the viewpoints of four ATs on four areas: their self-perceived roles in teaching practicum, the adequacy of the length of teaching practicum, the contribution of teaching practicum to the last TTs they had mentored, and the contribution of mentoring to their own professional development. The findings showed supporting TTs both professionally and emotionally was considered by the ATs to be the major roles of ATs in teaching practicum. In addition, the participants pointed to the requirement for increasing the length of teaching practicum. Further, the findings demonstrated teaching practicum contributed to the professional development of the last TTs the ATs had supervised and to that of theirs. Exploring ATs' viewpoints on teaching practicum in detail, the present study can be a guide for policy makers in the steps they will take to optimize the effectiveness of teaching practicum for enhancing both AT and TT professional learning. Moreover, this research could encourage ATs in diverse settings supervising TTs from distinct subject areas to ponder upon their teaching practicum experiences, which might facilitate their own professional learning.

Considering the number of the participants, it is obvious that the findings cannot be generalized to other contexts, indicating the need for further research to be carried out in an attempt to thoroughly examine ATs' views about teaching practicum. However, it is promising that teaching practicum caters for enhancing the professional development of not only TTs and but also ATs. Thus, it could be assumed that the longer is the better for both parties.

References

Allen, J. M., & Wright, S. E. (2014). Integrating theory and practice in the pre-service teacher education practicum. *Teachers and Teaching, 20*(2), 136-151. https://doi.org/10.1080/13540602.2013.848568

Altan, M. Z., & Sağlamel, H. (2015). Student teaching from the perspectives of cooperating teachers and pupils. *Cogent Education, 2*, 1-16. https://doi.org/10.1080/2331186X.2015.1086291

Ambrosetti, A., & Dekkers, J. (2010). The interconnectedness of the roles of mentors and mentees in pre-service teacher education mentoring relationships. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education, 35*(6), 42-55. https://doi.org/10.14221/ajte.2010v35n6.3

Beck, C., & Kosnik, C. (2000). Associate teachers in pre-service education: Clarifying and enhancing their role. *Journal of Education for Teaching, 26*(3), 207-224. https://doi.org/10.1080/713676888

Black, G. L., Olmsted, B., & Mottonen, A. L. (2016). Associate teachers' perceptions of effective mentorship professional development. *The New Educator, 12*(4), 322-342. https://doi.org/10.1080/1547688X.2016.1207828

Butler, B., & Cuenca, A. (2012). Conceptualizing the roles of mentor teachers during student teaching. *Action in Teacher Education, 34*, 296–308. https://doi.org/10.1080/01626620.2012.717012

Chien, C. W. (2015). Pre-service English teachers' perceptions and practice of field experience and professional learning from expert teachers' mentoring. *Teachers and Teaching, 21*(3), 328-345. https://doi.org/10.1080/13540602.2014.953817

Choy, D., Wong, A. F. L., Goh, K. C., & Low, E. L. (2014). Practicum experience: Pre-service teachers' self-perception of their professional growth. *Innovations in Education and Teaching International, 51*(5), 472-482. https://doi.org/10.1080/14703297.2013.791552

Clarke, A., Triggs, V., & Nielsen, W. (2014). Cooperating teacher participation in teacher education: A review of the literature. *Review of Educational Research, 84*(2), 163–202. https://doi.org/10.3102/0034654313499618

Davis J. S., & Fantozzi, V. B. (2016). What do student teachers want in mentor teachers?: Desired, expected, possible, and emerging Roles. *Mentoring and Tutoring, 24*(3), 250-266. https://doi.org/10.1080/13611267.2016.1222814

Ell, F., & Haigh, M. (2014). Getting beyond "gut feeling": Understanding how mentors judge readiness to teach. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Teacher Education, 43*(2), 143-155. https://doi.org/10.1080/1359866X.2014.934200

Fazio, X., & Volante, L. (2011). Preservice science teachers' perceptions of their practicum classrooms. *The Teacher Educator, 46*(2), 126-144. https://doi.org/10.1080/08878730.2011.553028

Ginkel, G. V., Drie, J. V., & Verloop, N. (2018). Mentor teachers' views of their mentees. *Mentoring & Tutoring: Partnership in Learning, 26*(2), 122-147. https://doi.org/10.1080/13611267.2018.1472542

Graves, S. (2010). Mentoring pre-service teachers: A case study. *Australasian Journal of Early Childhood, 35*(4), 14-20. https://doi.org/10.1177/183693911003500403

Grimmett, H., Forgasz, R., Williams, J., & White, S. (2018). Reimagining the role of mentor teachers in professional experience: moving to I as fellow teacher educator. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Teacher Education, 46*(4), 340-353. https://doi.org/10.1080/1359866X.2018.1437391

Grundnoff, L. (2011). Rethinking the practicum: Limitations and possibilities. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Teacher Education, 39*(3), 223-234. https://doi.org/10.1080/1359866X.2011.588308

Hall, K. M., Draper, R. J., Smith, L. K., & Bullough Jr, R. V. (2008). More than a place to teach: Exploring the perceptions of the roles and responsibilities of mentor teachers. *Mentoring & Tutoring: Partnership in Learning, 16*(3), 328-345. https://doi.org/10.1080/13611260802231708

Hudson, P. (2013). Mentoring as professional development: 'Growth for both' mentor and mentee. *Professional Development in Education, 39*(5), 771-783. https://doi.org/10.1080/19415257.2012.749415

Hudson, P. (2016). Forming the mentor-mentee relationship. *Mentoring & Tutoring: Partnership in Learning, 24*(1), 30-43. https://doi.org/10.1080/13611267.2016.1163637

Izadinia, M. (2015). Talking the talk and walking the walk: Pre-service teachers' evaluation of their mentors. *Mentoring & Tutoring: Partnership in Learning, 23*(4), 341-353. https://doi.org/10.1080/13611267.2015.1096550

Jaipal, K. (2009). Re-envisioning mentorship: Pre-service teachers and associate teachers as co-learners. *Teaching Education, 20*(3), 257-276. https://doi.org/10.1080/10476210902887503

Jones, M., Ryan, J. (2014). Learning in the practicum: Engaging pre-service teachers in reflective practice in the online space. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Teacher Education, 42*(2), 132-146. https://doi.org/10.1080/1359866X.2014.892058

Li, Y. L. (2009). The perspectives and experiences of Hong Kong preschool teacher mentors: Implications for mentoring. *Teacher Development, 13*(2), 147-158. https://doi.org/10.1080/13664530903043970

Lin, Z., Wu, B., Wang, F., & Yang, D. (2019). Enhancing student teacher motivation through mentor feedback on practicum reports: A case study. *Journal of Education for Teaching*, *45*, 1-3. https://doi.org/10.1080/02607476.2019.1675355

Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Sage Publications. https://doi.org/10.1016/0147-1767(85)90062-8

Margolis, J. (2007). Improving relationships between mentor teachers and student teachers: Engaging in a pedagogy of explicitness. *The New Educator, 3*(1), 75-94. https://doi.org/10.1080/15476880601141540

Merriam, S. (1995). What can you tell from an N of 1? Issues of validity and reliability in qualitative research. *PAACE Journal of Lifelong Learning, 4*, 50-60.

Ministry of National Education. (2018). https://bit.ly/32BihrH

Moses, I., Berry, A., Saab, N., & Admiraal, W. (2017). Who wants to become a teacher? Typology of student-teachers' commitment to teaching. *Journal of Education for Teaching, 43*(4), 444-457.

Mtika, P. (2011). Trainee teachers' experiences of teaching practicum: Issues, challenges, and new Possibilities. *Africa Education Review, 8(*3), 551-567. https://doi.org/10.1080/18146627.2011.618715

Mukeredzi, T. G. (2017). Mentoring in a cohort model of practicum: Mentors and preservice teachers' experiences in a rural South African school. *Sage Open*, *7*(1), 1-15 https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244017709863

Pandey, S. C., & Patnaik, S. (2014). Establishing reliability and validity in qualitative inquiry: A critical examination. *Jharkhand Journal of Development and Management Studies, 12*(1), 5743-5753.

Ramsaroop, S., & Gravett, S. (2017). The potential of teaching schools in enabling student teacher learning for the teaching profession. *Journal of Curriculum Studies, 49*(6), 848-865. https://doi.org/10.1080/00220272.2017.1325516

Sandik, L.V., Solhaug, T., Lejonberg, E., Elstad, E., & Christophersen, K. A. (2019). Predictions of school mentors' effort in teacher education programmes. *European Journal of Teacher Education, 42*(5), 1-17. https://doi.org/10.1080/02619768.2019.1652902

Sheridan, L., & Young, M. (2016). Genuine conversation: The enabler in good mentoring of pre-service teachers. *Teachers and Teaching: Theory and Practice, 23*(6), 658-673. https://doi.org/10.1080/13540602.2016.1218327

Tang, S. Y. F., & Choi, P. L. (2005). Connecting theory and practice in mentor preparation: Mentoring for the improvement of teaching and learning. *Mentoring & Tutoring: Partnership in Learning, 13*(3), 383-401. https://doi.org/10.1080/13611260500206002

Turnbull, M. (2005). Student teacher professional agency in the practicum. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Teacher Education, 33*(2), 195-208. https://doi.org/10.1080/13598660500122116

Tillema, H. H., Smith, K., & Leshem, S. (2011). Dual roles – conflicting purposes: A comparative study on perceptions on assessment in mentoring relations during practicum. *European Journal of Teacher Education, 34*(2), 139-159. https://doi.org/10.1080/02619768.2010.543672

Tshuma, R., & Ndebele, C. (2015). Investigating the extent to which mentor selection in Zimbabwe's 2-5-2 teaching practice enhances continuous improvement of student teachers' teaching skills and competences. *International Journal of Educational Sciences, 8*(2), 407-418. https://doi.org/10.1080/09751122.2015.11890262

Vries, S. D., Jansen, E. P. W. A., Lorenz, M. H., & van de Grift, W. J. C. M. (2015). Student teachers' participation in learning activities and effective teaching behaviours. *European Journal of Teacher Education, 38*(4), 460-483. https://doi.org/10.1080/02619768.2015.1061990

Wang, L., & Ha, M. (2012). Mentoring in TGfU teaching: Mutual engagement of pre-service teachers, cooperating teachers and university supervisors. *European Physical Education Review, 18*(1), 47-61. https://doi.org/10.1177/1356336X11430654

Yoon, J., & Kim, J. (2019). A sociocultural theoretical approach to understanding mentor–mentee interactions during a Teaching English as a Second Language practicum at the master's degree level. *Mentoring & Tutoring: Partnership in Learning, 27*(1), 88-108. https://doi.org/10.1080/13611267.2019.1583411

Yan, C., & He, C. (2010). Transforming the existing model of teaching practicum: A study of Chinese EFL student teachers' perceptions. *Journal of Education for Teaching, 36*(1), 57-73. https://doi.org/10.1080/02607470903462065