

The Importance of Duration in Teaching Practice for Education College Students Abdullah Mohammed Hussein

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المخلص :

تعتبر ممارسة التدريس، المعروفة أيضا بالتدريس الطلابي، على نطاق واسع العنصر الأكثر تأثيرا في برامج إعداد المعلمين قبل الخدمة في جميع كليات التربية. سؤال مستمر يواجه سياسة تعليم المعلمين هو كم يجب أن تستمر هذه الخبرة الميدانية لإعداد معلمين مستقبليين بشكل فعال للعب دورهم كمعلمين في الفصول الدراسية. تستعرض هذه الورقة الأدبيات البحثية حول مدة التربية العملية، وتفحص التفاوت في طول الفترة التدريسية، والعلاقة بين طلاب التربية عملية في التدريس وطلابهم ومع مشرفيهم – أيضا- ، والجدل العلمي المستمر حول ما إذا كان تمديد فترة التربية عملية يظهر نتائج أفضل من تحسين جودتها. وتظهر الأدلة أن مدة العمل مهمة؛ لكنها ليست العامل الوحيد حيث يجب أن يصل التدريب إلى حد أدنى من الوقت، مع إشراف جيد، قبل بناء متدربين لهم مهارات وموثوقية. بعد ذلك، يعتمد التحسن أكثر على جودة الإرشاد، وتنظيم التدريب، وبيئة المدرسة أكثر من الوقت الإضافي بمفرده. تختتم

الورقة بمناقشة كيف يمكن لكليات التربية تصميم برامج ممارسة تدريسية توازن بين مدة كافية وإشراف ودعم قويين.

Abstract

Teaching Practice, also known as student teaching, is widely regarded as the most influential component of pre-service teacher preparation programs in all colleges of education. A persistent question facing teacher education policy is how long this field experience should last in order to meaningfully prepare future teachers to play their role in the classroom. This paper reviews the research literature on the duration of practice teaching, examining the variation in teaching practice length, the relationship between teaching practice students and their students and with their supervisors, and the ongoing scholarly debate over whether extending the length of teaching practice placements produces better outcomes than improving their quality. The evidence shows that duration is important, but it is not the only factor. Practice teaching needs to reach a minimum amount of time, with good supervision, before it can build trainees' confidence and skill. After that point, further improvement depends more on the quality of mentoring, the organization of the placement, and the school setting than on extra time alone. The paper ends by discussing how colleges of education can design Teaching practice programs that balance enough duration with strong supervision and support."

1. Introduction

Teaching practice is considered as the most teacher preparation programs, in which student teachers move from studying pedagogy in university classrooms to applying it under supervision in real schools. Colleges of education generally treat this experience as the point at which theoretical coursework is tested against the realities of classroom life, and student teachers themselves consistently describe it as one of the most formative parts of their training.

A question that appears across teacher education policy discussions is not whether practice teaching matters, but how much of it is required. Programs around the world differ enormously in how long they require students to spend in schools before graduation, and even within a single country,

requirements can vary by institution, subject area, and grade level. This variation raises a practical concern for colleges of education: is a longer teaching practice simply better, or does the value of teaching practice depend on factors other than time alone? This paper addresses that question by reviewing the available research evidence on the duration of practice teaching and its relationship to teacher preparedness, self-efficacy, and professional growth.

2. Significance of the Problem

Decisions about TP length are not merely administrative. They affect how colleges of education select supervisors, how partner schools plan for hosting student teachers, and how students themselves experience the transition from coursework to classroom responsibility. A practicum that is too short may leave student teachers with limited opportunity to build relationships with pupils, experiment with instructional strategies, and receive corrective feedback before entering the profession independently. A practicum that is extended without giving attention to mentoring quality, however, may prolong a weak experience rather than strengthen it.

While understanding the research on duration has direct implications for curriculum planning in colleges of education, for national accreditation standards, and for the interests of both student teachers and the pupils they teach during their training.

3. Literature Review

3.1 Practice Teaching as the Core of Teacher Preparation

Field experience is consistently identified in the literature as the component of teacher preparation most valued by student teachers themselves. A comprehensive review of decades of research found that student teachers regard their cooperating teachers and their field placements as central to their development as professionals, more so than any single university course (Clarke, Triggs, & Nielsen, 2014). Similarly, practice teaching has been linked to gains in student teachers' sense of preparedness to teach and their broader professional development (Darling-Hammond, Chung, & Frelow, 2002; Zeichner, 2002).

These findings establish that practice teaching is not a peripheral add-on to teacher education but is instead one of its most consequential elements. This

centrality is precisely why questions about how long the experience should last carry such weight for program design.

3.2 Cross-National and Institutional Variation in Duration

The length of teaching practice varies enormously across countries and institutions. Comparative reviews describe placements ranging from a four-week session in New Zealand to a full academic year of internship in Belgium, Chinese Taipei, and Germany (Ronfeldt & Reininger, 2012). Within the United States, student teaching is typically completed over a single semester of twelve to fifteen weeks, though this differs by institution, certification level, and degree type. Historical policy shifts illustrate a broader international trend toward lengthening field placements: in 1989, U.S. accrediting bodies raised the minimum requirement for student teaching from eight to ten weeks, and Japan doubled its minimum requirement from two to four weeks in 1991 (Ronfeldt & Reininger, 2012). This trend reflects a widespread policy assumption that more time in the field produces better-prepared teachers, an assumption the following section examines more closely.

Variation is not limited to national systems. Even within a single country, universities that emphasize academic coursework often require only a few dozen hours of practicum contact, while dedicated teacher-education colleges may require well over a hundred hours per year across three or four years of study. This layered variation means that colleges of education cannot rely on a single external benchmark for what counts as an adequate practicum length; the appropriate duration depends partly on how the rest of the program is structured.

At the University of Zawia, College of Education, we have about two or three weeks where our students practice real teaching in classrooms. This period is very short to have well-experienced teachers.

3.3 Duration Versus Quality: The Central Debate

The most direct empirical test of the duration question comes from a large-scale study of more than a thousand prospective teachers in a major urban school district, which compared student teachers whose teaching practice periods were lengthened against those with standard-length. The study found that duration alone had little effect on new teachers' instructional preparedness, efficacy, or career plans, while the quality of the student

teaching experience, particularly the guidance provided by cooperating teachers, had significant and positive effects (Ronfeldt & Reininger, 2012). Notably, the benefits of high-quality placements were found to be even larger when the practicum was shorter, suggesting that quality can partially compensate for limited time, though the reverse does not appear to hold: additional time in a poorly supervised placement does not reliably produce better outcomes.

This does not mean duration is irrelevant. Other research indicates that there is a minimum time limit below which practice teaching has little measurable effect on student teachers' sense of preparedness, estimated at approximately twenty hours of field engagement, after which additional practice contributes more clearly to trainees' confidence. Among the various components of teacher preparation, field-based teaching practice has been rated as contributing more to a sense of preparedness than microteaching or classroom observation alone, but only once that baseline threshold of sustained engagement is met.

When we look to all these findings together, they refer to a model rather than a simple linear relationship: teaching practice appears to require a sufficient minimum duration to have any meaningful effect, but once that floor is met, further gains depend far more on the structure and quality of supervision than on additional weeks in the classroom.

3.4 Duration, Self-Efficacy, and Preparedness

Research on teacher self-efficacy during the teaching practice reports mixed results, and this inconsistency itself is informative. Some studies report increases in student teachers' self-efficacy following field placements, while others find no significant increase, particularly in placements where student teachers were not given substantial opportunity to teach independently. This pattern reinforces the point that duration functions as a necessary but not sufficient condition: a longer teaching practice that does not translate into more actual teaching responsibility, more feedback, and more reflective practice may fail to build confidence regardless of its length.

This concern is consistent with earlier research describing the difficulties beginning teachers face in their first years of independent teaching, particularly around classroom management and workload (Veenman, 1984),

difficulties that a well-designed and adequately extended practicum is intended to help pre-empt.

Cross-national comparative research on initial teacher education placements also emphasizes that trainees are inducted into teaching in a progressive and cumulative manner over multiple periods of school placement, gradually taking on greater responsibility as their programs advance (O'Leary, Ryan, & Ó Gallchóir, 2024; Darling-Hammond, 2017). Under this cumulative model, duration matters less as a single block of time and more as the total span across which student teachers can progressively build competence and professional identity.

3.5 Evidence from Extended Placement Models in Allied Professional Fields

Because field placement design is not unique to teacher education, evidence from allied professions that rely on similar clinical or practicum-based training offers a useful point of comparison. In health-related fields such as nursing and optometry, researchers have documented growing dissatisfaction with short, block-style rotations, which are criticized for leaving trainees with limited continuity, weak relationships with supervisors, and reduced opportunity to participate fully in real practice. Extended placement models, in which trainees remain in a single setting for a longer, continuous period, have been proposed as a remedy, and students who experienced longer placements in these fields have reported higher satisfaction and stronger perceived learning outcomes than those in short rotations.

This cross-disciplinary evidence lends indirect support to the idea that continuity and duration matter for relationship-building and skill consolidation, echoing concerns raised specifically about teaching practicums, where traditional short or intermittent placement schedules (such as a single day per week) have been criticized for leaving too little time for student teachers and cooperating teachers to build the trust and communication needed for effective mentoring.

4. Theoretical Framework

The research reviewed above can be understood through the lens of experiential and situated learning theory, which holds that professional competence develops through cycles of concrete experience, reflection,

conceptualization, and renewed action, rather than through the accumulation of time alone. Applied to practice teaching, this framework explains why raw duration is an incomplete predictor of outcomes: what matters is whether the time available is structured to allow repeated cycles of teaching, feedback, and reflection. A practicum long enough to allow several such cycles, supported by an engaged cooperating teacher, would be expected to build competence and confidence more reliably than a placement of equal or even greater length that offers only limited opportunities to actually teach and reflect.

This theoretical perspective is consistent with the empirical finding that quality of supervision moderates the effect of duration, and it supports a practical conclusion for colleges of education: duration should be planned as the number of teaching-and-reflection cycles a program can realistically support, not simply as a count of weeks or hours.

For colleges of education responsible for designing and accrediting practice teaching programs, the literature suggests several practical implications.

First, programs should ensure that Teaching Practice meets a minimum sustained duration, since very brief placements are unlikely to affect student teachers' preparedness and confidence in any measurable way. A teaching practice broken into isolated, infrequent visits is unlikely to provide the continuity needed for the trust and communication that effective mentoring requires.

Second, beyond that minimum, colleges of education should resist the assumption that longer is always better. Investment may be better directed toward strengthening fresh teachers' training, structuring regular feedback cycles, and ensuring student teachers are given genuine, increasing responsibility for instruction, rather than simply extending the calendar length of the placement.

Third, because gains from high-quality supervision appear to be especially clear in shorter placements, colleges of education operating under real constraints on how much time they can allocate to field-of-practice teaching should prioritize mentor quality and structured reflection when comparison must be made.

Finally, the cumulative, multi-stage model used in several international systems, in which student teachers progress through several placements of

increasing length and responsibility across their program rather than a single terminal block, offers a way to reconcile the need for adequate total duration with the practical limits on how long any single placement can run.

6. Conclusion

The duration of practice teaching is an important but incomplete determinant of its value to education college students. The research literature supports a threshold view: practice teaching must last long enough, and be structured to allow enough genuine teaching and reflection, for it to meaningfully shape student teachers' preparedness, confidence, and professional identity. Beyond that threshold, however, the quality of mentoring and supervision, the degree of real teaching responsibility given to student teachers, and the continuity of the placement matter more than additional weeks alone. Colleges of education seeking to strengthen their practice teaching programs should treat duration as one design variable among several, planning practicum length in conjunction with mentor preparation, supervisory structure, and the progressive sequencing of field experiences across the teacher preparation program.

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