

## Attitudes of Iranian Teachers and Students towards Internship

**Zabih Ollah Javanbakht**

EFL Teacher, Department of Education, Isfahan, Iran

### Abstract

The purpose of the present study is to identify problems of internship course (teacher training) in teacher training centers and to provide appropriate solutions for eliminating the problems and improving the quality of internship courses in order to prepare student teachers to obtain qualifications for teaching job. In a qualitative-quantitative one-group research design, the data were collected via internship problems questionnaire. In effect, the questionnaire was categorized into four groups of pedagogical, attitudinal, structural and physical problems. The participants were selected based on whole-sampling. Data were analyzed qualitatively and quantitatively using the descriptive statistics such as frequency statistics. The findings showed that the most significant problems of internship courses were cooperating teachers' lack of using technology-based teaching materials as well as having little knowledge in education theories, developmental psychology and learning theories, and not using new and innovative teaching methodologies (pedagogical), lack of opportunity for cooperating teachers to talk with student teachers about their teaching methodologies and attempt to tackle their potential problems as well as supervisors' lack of provision of a teaching sample for student teachers (attitudinal), training in urban schools (structural), and lack of appropriate physical space for implementing new teaching methodologies (physical).

**Keywords:** internship, teacher training, attitude, Iranian teachers

### INTRODUCTION

Internship in teacher training means to put theoretical knowledge into practice by means of numerous and repeated experiences to gain practical skills for teaching (Raouf, 1996, p. 99). It is also known by terms such as teacher training, teaching practical teaching, internship training, and teaching exercise.

Internship is the culmination of all teacher-training activities that learning situations provide opportunities for intern's success and failure; it needs each participant's undivided attention (Virginia Commonwealth University of Education, 2011). Internship refers to a series of applied and organized activities that facilitate the trend of student teachers' preparation from theoretical knowledge to the performance of science-applied activities. The internship experience occurs when pre-service teachers are exposed to diverse aspects of being a teacher such as "classroom management,

motivation, reflective thinking and differentiation" through immersion in an actual functioning classroom (Kennedy & Archambault, 2012, p. 186).

Internship, as a general concept, has long been used through the history. Humans have always tried to transfer their experiences and findings to their children. In the primitive communities, teaching and learning had been done by traditional practices through rebuilding experiences, maintaining and developing them as required information in life. Traditional schools which were held in temples, churches and mosques prepared learners to teach literacy to others, because the aim was to equip learners with literacy. Learners with skills in literacy, reading and writing must teach them to others.

In Iran, the first semi-official teacher education program for practical teaching was presented in a course, in 1911, called "Principles of Education" in Drolfonoon School. No formal study has been conducted to investigate its objectives and administrative procedures. The study of teacher training background and the remainders indicates the consideration of scholars, experts, planners and all those involved in teacher training to necessity and efficiency of practical teaching program. In 1982 and 1983, some studies formally focused on practical teaching that was led to including practical teaching course in all disciplines of teachers training centers since 1983. (Moshfegh Arani, 2003, p. 7).

Teachers learn theories and techniques in university and apply that knowledge in internship with guidance, support and increasing responsibilities. The major purpose of the Internship program is to develop and strengthen student's skills and to prepare them for the profession. It provides an opportunity to the fresh candidates to experience working conditions and requirement of today's professional business environment (Parveen & Mirza, 2012). Internship must be carefully designed to allow teachers to gain a wide experience, reflect on their performance, learn a number of teaching strategies to learn and learn to solve problems (Darling-Hammond, Gendler & Wise, 1990).

Undoubtedly, if teaching skills are not put into frequent practices in teacher training centers and theories are not blended into personal experiences, student teachers will never reach at the level of relative skill for teaching and class management. Internship is "a plan devised to ensure the readiness process in the course of transition from theory to practice. Student teachers, while passing actively and carefully these steps, can use their theoretical and practical knowledge confidently and skillfully in the classroom and laboratory" (Moshfegh Arani, 2000, p. 7).

The ultimate goal of teacher training is "to strengthen the self-confidence, competencies and professional skills required to accept the duties and responsibilities of education" (Moshfegh Arani, 2003, p. 10). Passing this course in two semesters, student teachers can identify teaching in the real environment and professional conditions, adopting the curriculum to the learners' needs, effective and useful communication with learners, classroom management and, generally, acquiring the required skills for teaching

profession. The most important objectives of practical teaching course is getting students interested in teaching profession and attaining a positive attitude toward it. Internship should be run in such a way that the students learn their professional policies and skills and they can easily organize and manage their class. Some novice teachers are concerned about how well they would be able to establish intimate relationships with their students while they have a good control over the class. Thus, as long as teachers are unable to manage classroom well, they would not expect that effective learning takes place.

Parveen and Mirza (2012) believe that the internship program is of great significance because it ensures the professional preparation of students in various ways such as understanding of the target profession and future prospects of working conditions in that profession. Teacher training centers are not able to provide all necessary information and knowledge for student teachers. Internship is unable not only to teach the theoretical information to the students but provided numerous problems and questions for interns. The experienced and qualified teachers and principals can provide clear answers to the numerous questions of student teachers; solve their educational and training problems by consultation and cooperation with each other and internship's instructors in order to provide relative readiness for their job. However, it was observed that for several reasons that principals and cooperating teachers do not provide collaboration adequately. While internship course is complementary to teaching-learning activities in teacher training centers and brings about success for student teachers, but actually it is considered as a recess for student teachers. Regarding the issues in internship, no study was directly specified to investigate the problems of internship course in teacher training centers. Therefore, this study entitled "Qualitative analysis of student-teachers' perspective toward internship problems" was developed to detect the existing problems of internship programs.

Teaching is art, science and experience, and these three factors give the teacher ability for teaching and transferring knowledge to the learners. The importance and necessity of internship programs for professional qualification of teachers is to the extent that without passing this course, the teaching qualification certificate and teaching assignment should not be given to the graduates of teacher training centers (Safi, 2001). The perfect learning depends on the development of knowledge in three areas of cognitive, affective and motor. Mental-motor skills is achieved when there is an interaction between cognitive and affective learning. This interaction is established when the conditions are provided for the manifestation of motor skills and behavior (Moshfegh Arani, 2003, p. 9).

Beck and Kosnik (2002) indicated seven aspects of positive field experiences based student teachers' experiences: (a) emotional support from the cooperating teacher, (b) mutual relationship with the cooperating teacher, (c) collaboration with the cooperating teacher, (d) flexibility in teaching methods and content (e) feedback from the cooperating teacher, (f) cooperating teacher's appropriate approach to teaching and

learning, and (g) a heavy but not excessive workload during the experience. Hence, in order to prepare student teachers for teaching, it is necessary to send them to schools once a week to apply their theoretical knowledge and thereby they could be relatively self-sufficient.

Viciano and Mayorga-Vegato (2013) investigated the effect of an internship on the pre-service teachers' conception of the planning of physical education. A sample of 149 pre-service teachers from the University of Granada participated in their quasi-experimental study. A questionnaire and a semi-structured interview were employed to measure the pre-service teachers' attitudes. Results showed that before the internship, planning was the most important phase for the pre-service teachers. After the internship, intervention significantly increased with regard to the pretest and became higher than planning. A significant increase of doubts about planning design and interactive decision-making inside the physical education classes were also detected. The internship made the teacher aware of the problems in coordinating theory and practice, thus causing important changes related to teaching physical education.

Hendrikse (2013) conducted a qualitative case study drawing from the subjective views of both the mentor teachers and the student-teacher interns already immersed in the ethos and everyday workings of a functioning local private school. The purpose of the study was to find factors that facilitated or impeded the development and professional growth of the student-teacher intern. The participants comprised of the student teachers already studying through open and distance learning together with their assigned mentor teachers. The findings revealed an expansion of the student-teacher intern's field of involvement and participation in the school and all school related activities. The mentor teachers also benefitted in various ways and most importantly were provided with an opportunity to reflect on their personal teaching practice and philosophy. It was also found that the facilitating and impeding factors affecting interns' professional growth had a direct bearing on the relationship that existed between the student teacher and their class mentor teacher.

Gage (1978, as cited in Mehrmohammadi, 2000) believes that no person other than a teacher can have more influence on what happens in schools; the teacher can combine the education process with joy and prosperity, or the make it ineffective. Therefore, the students' educational success and achievement is dependent on the teachers who have the necessary theoretical and practical abilities, since the teacher, in addition to his/her responsibilities to design, implement and evaluate the teaching process in educational contexts, he/she also provides the appropriate environment for accelerating the education. Hence, the student teachers in internship can get familiar with the actual teaching environment, put their theoretical knowledge into practice; gain confidence through practical teaching; relatively become self-sufficient and prepare to teach in schools without anxiety. The present study seeks to answer this question:

What are the problems of student teachers in internship?

## METHOD

### Participants

Total enumeration sampling method with one group was used in the present study. In other words, all students ( $n = 120$ ) who were studying in teacher training center located in the city of Yasuj were participated in this study.

### Instruments

The present study has been conducted using qualitative and quantitative methods, with emphasis on Delphi that is a qualitative assessment. Delphi is a systematic method of extraction and accumulation of conscious judgments of a team of professionals on a subject or a question. Maleki (2007) stated that "Delphi is a technique that studies the individual's opinions, judgments and attitudes on the needs and intentions of organizations or professions and then tries to reach a certain agreement" (p. 60). "Delphi is used either as a method of research or a method of data collection" (Salsali, Parvizi & Bagheri, 2007, p. 46). This technique is done using a series of questions that is gradually given to the participants (Maleki, 2007, p. 60).

According to Brown, Kutcheran and Drakly (1989, as cited in Maleki, 1997, p. 63), it is not necessary that all participants of the Delphi technique be expert and scholar. They believed that if some of the participants are knowledgeable, the participation of less knowledgeable and experienced people will not create a specific problem.

### Procedures

The Delphi method as a qualitative assessment instrument was used in order to collect data. This method was led to the development of the questionnaire. Then, focused-group was administered on cooperating teachers. In the first phase, with regard to the intern's perceptions and their problems and cooperating teachers' ( $n = 38$ ) opinions, a set of questions was presented. According to the participants' responses, a five-point Likert-type questionnaire was developed and submitted to the participants of study. Their answers were then rated and ranked, and the results were given to the participants. Regarding their performance, the participants were asked to respond to the questionnaire and also moderate their responses if their opinions did not match with the obtained rankings.

## RESULTS

With regard to the results of study, the problems of internship were categorized into four groups of attitudinal, structural, educational and physical. It should be noted that this categorization was done to provide a more understandable insight toward the internship problems; in fact the problems exists as a unified whole that affect the quality of internship courses. Thus, the problems are not separable since they have reciprocal effects on each other. The results identified each question's rank in specific

group as well as all groups. Final scoring and ranking of students and cooperating teachers was calculated. The results are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Questionnaire on Internship's problems

Items	Educational problems
1-1	Cooperating teachers do not use educational media in teaching.
1-2	Cooperating teachers do not use new teaching methods and models, they continue with the traditional methods of teaching.
1-3	Cooperating teachers do not help students for designing lesson plans.
1-4	There is a significant difference between theories and what cooperative teachers practice.
1-5	Cooperating teachers do not help students how to manage the class.
1-6	In internship days, interns gave the opportunity to teach courses such as dictation, composition and physical exercise; they cannot experience to teach other courses.
1-7	Cooperating teachers have little knowledge about appropriate ways to communicate with students.
Attitudinal problems	
2-1	Cooperating teachers either avoid teaching in our presence or behaving artificially.
2-2	Staffs do not make students aware of various school activities.
2-3	The Psychological condition of school is not appropriate for discussion among students, cooperating teachers and other school teachers.
2-4	Cooperating teachers just ask interns to help them in correcting papers and asking questions from the students.
Structural problems	
3-1	Training in urban schools is not proportionate with the future working conditions of students.
3-2	Internship supervisors do not have enough opportunity to attend at school to discuss with students and solve their problems.
3-3	Cooperating teachers have a little information about theories of education, developmental psychology and learning theory.
3-4	Teacher training center does not provide transportation service for students.
3-5	The relationship between the courses and teacher training administrative procedures with the students' needs is weak.
3-6	Principals' and Cooperating teachers' knowledge regarding the objectives of practical teaching is low.
Physical problems	
4-1	The physical structure of class or sitting arrangement of students is not appropriate to implement teaching methods.
4-2	The physical structure of classes in schools is not appropriate for group activities
4-3	The physical structure of schools is not appropriate for students' joy and fun

The results indicated that 18 participants did not obtain any score. Table 2 shows the educational problems. The results showed that the highest scores of educational problems referred to the cooperating teachers' non-use of educational media and new teaching methodologies.

Table 2. Ranking of educational problems

Items	Rank in the educational problems	Total Rank
1-1	1	3
1-2	2	5
1-3	3	6
1-4	3	6
1-5	4	8
1-6	5	9
1-7	6	14

Table 3 shows the attitudinal problems. The results indicate that the highest score in attitudinal problems is related to the avoidance of cooperating teachers to teach in the presence of students or providing an artificial teaching. Other problems are 'not making students aware of the school activities by school staff', and 'lack of appropriate school's psychological condition for discussion among teachers, cooperating teachers, instructors and students'.

Table 3. Ranking of attitudinal problems

Items	Rank in attitudinal problems	Total Rank
2-1	1	7
2-2	2	10
2-3	3	12
2-4	4	16

Table 4 shows the structural problems. The results show that the highest score in structural problems is related to incompatibility of internship schools (Urban schools) to students' working conditions in the future. Other factors include 'not having adequate opportunity for instructors to attend at school for discussing students' problems and attempt to solve them', cooperating less knowledgeable teachers regarding the theories of education, 'developmental psychology and learning theories'.

Table 4. Ranking of structural problems

Items	Rating the structural problems	Rank in total
3-1	1	1
3-2	2	2
3-3	3	4
3-4	4	7
3-5	5	13
3-6	6	18

Table 5 shows the physical problems. According to the results, the major physical problems are 'lack of physical space and necessary facilities to implement the active methods of teaching in the classroom', another major problem was related to the physical structure of classroom and schools that is not appropriate to conduct group activities and having joy and fun.

Table 5. Rating of physical problems

Items	Rank in physical problems	Rank in total
4-1	1	11
4-2	2	15
4-3	3	17

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Various studies show that both experienced teachers and teachers who have recently graduated believe that experiences they gained in the internship is one of the most powerful components and even the most powerful component of teacher preparation program (Wilson, Floden, & Ferrini-Mundy, 2002, p. 17). During the internship, the prospective teachers have the opportunity to develop their attitudes and educational practices. Despite the importance of this period in the development of teachers, few studies have been investigated the experiences of student teachers in internship in various fields (Giebelhaus & Bowman, 2002; Hawky, 1998; Wilson et al., 2002). In Iran, no comprehensive study has been performed in the area of internship and teacher training program; the present study is the beginning of research in this area.

The current internship programs do not pay much attention to the evaluation and preparation of candidates regarding the employment of specific assessment tools. They do not provide the necessary aid for critical transition from studentship to teaching profession. They also do not develop the skill of self-evaluation. There are other factors out of new teachers' control that make it most difficult to fairly assess about whether or



not he/she has acquired good teaching skills (Darling Hammond, Gendler & Wise , 1990). A teaching internship program will be different from current programs if:

1. The intern learn by and modeling.
2. The intern gradually assumes the degrees of responsibility.
3. The intern receives regular supervision and guidance from senior teachers.
4. The intern is responsible for doing specified range of experiences (Darling Hammond, Gendler & Wise, 1990).

Regarding the extent of problems in internship course and the urgent needs of the student teachers for acquiring the scientific and practical skills of teaching, it seems that the current process of internship administration is not accountable and it is time for education and teacher training authorities to revisit planning and its implementation by changing their attitude and specific attention to this course. The findings of the present study show that incompatibility of internship schools and the students' current needs, teacher's lack of time, teachers' non-use of educational media, inappropriateness of teachers' scientific information with technology advancement received higher ranks. In similar manner, Panda and Nayak (2014) found that novice teachers mainly face problems related to managing students and maintaining discipline in classroom. However other problems such as using teaching aids, communication related problems also explored during the investigation.

The results of this study indicated that the most important problems of internship course are as follow: training in urban schools, lack of opportunities for teachers to have discussion with students, to criticize their teaching practices and to solve their potential problems, teachers' non-use of educational media and their little knowledge in educational theories, developmental psychology and learning theory, not using new teaching methods and models and following traditional teaching methods.

With regard to four categorizations of problems, to say, educational, attitudinal, structural, and physical the problems are teachers' non-use of educational media (educational), cooperating teachers' avoidance of teaching in the presence of students (attitudinal) internship in urban areas (structural) and inappropriateness of classroom physical conditions for implementation of new teaching methods (physical). Common problems in intern/student teaching are as follows:

Competing activities: activity might be in the form of a job, academic work, social or athletic activities. However, any activity that stops an intern/student teacher's performance should be abandoned or intensively modified for the duration of internship. The student teacher's major responsibility is to the students, their parents, the cooperating teacher and the school.

Appearance: the teaching role is a professional role, so an appropriate dressing and personal hygiene is expected from a person who plays this role.

Lack of understanding of tasks that are basic to teaching: A list of some problems include: 1) inability to manage and control classroom 2) not motivating students 3) not being organized 4) incomplete planning 5) failure to budget time 6) lack of mastery over the subject matter 7) unethical behavior.

Once a problem area is identified, the student teacher, cooperating teacher, and university supervisor should work together to solve it. The prospective teacher is responsible for his/her behavior, and the final evaluation should reflect all existing problem areas (Virginia Commonwealth University of Education, 2011).

Planning for implantation of internship should be done with the aid of qualified teachers, the heads of teacher training centers, regional and provincial education office on August every year. Then, the following steps should be taken:

1. Inviting the principals and teachers of selected internship schools to teacher training center and holding the briefings on the objectives of internship programs, exchanging the experiences of interns and collaborating with them and holding workshops on teaching and evaluation methodologies in order to implement the internship program.
2. The purpose of interns' evaluation is to help them to develop and to document the development during the semester. Evaluation begins during the first week and continues through the end of the internship. Cooperating teacher's observations and critiques and the university supervisor are designed to guide and enlighten the intern's teaching performance and to assist in socializing interns as professionals.
3. A major part of the evaluation process is the weekly meeting between the cooperating teacher and the intern. This should be at least a one-hour period where they can discuss, uninterrupted, the interns' planning, decisions, management, strengths and weaknesses, and what kinds of specific behaviors need to be improved. At the end of the meeting, both the intern and the cooperating teacher should be aware of what is expected for the upcoming week (Virginia Commonwealth University of Education, 2011).
4. The selection of schools for internship should be based on the following conditions:
  - These schools should be a combination of regular (urban or mono-grades) and rural (multigrade) schools since student teachers will spend at least their first five years of experience in multigrade schools.

- The selected schools should have qualified and experienced teachers and principals and interested in collaboration with students.
- They should have educational materials and media and their teachers should use media in practice.
- School teachers should have adequate knowledge regarding the educational and learning theories and developmental psychology and necessary skills for transferring this knowledge to students.
- The schools' programs should be designed in such a way that it could be changed once every two weeks based on students' needs and student teachers could be familiar with teaching methodologies of different subjects.
- The school teachers should be able to teach different subject in the presence of interns without anxiety.
- The school teachers should make the student-teachers aware of class management skills, appropriate ways to communicate with students, lesson planning and demonstration.

In a study developed by Grossman and colleagues (2000) on 10 beginner teachers, interview and classroom observations was used to determine how teachers appropriated their pedagogical ideas through their first three years of teaching (including their student-teaching). Some student teachers were assigned to cooperating teachers' classes with teaching similar ideas toward teaching; other student teachers were placed with cooperating teachers whose opinions were significantly different. Student teachers in both situations were able to develop their pedagogical knowledge and personal teaching styles that were independent of the cooperating teachers' styles. Similar results were found by Hollingsworth (1989), Weber, Radu and Rhoads (2011).

1. The representative of education office should be attended at schools on internship days to monitor the administration of internship program; the head of teacher training center should also attend once every two weeks and try to alleviate the problems in addition to monitoring.
2. A stipend should be allocated to education and official staff of schools regarding the number of student teachers.
3. Vehicles should be considered for the transportation of students and instructors from teacher training centers.
4. On internship's day, at least one hour should be dedicated to discussion among teachers, student teachers and university instructors in order to help to overcome the potential problems.

5. The official staff of schools should make students aware of the current school activities such as clerical activities (book of indicator, book of statistics, etc) since students may become school principal in addition to teaching at the beginning of their teaching experience.
6. School principals should regard student teachers like formal teachers, monitor their work and provide a place for their break time.
7. The teaching hours of internship should be declined to 6 hours per 10 students in order to provide the opportunity for instructors to criticize and discuss on student-teachers' teaching methodology and help to overcome them.
8. Once every two months, a meeting should be held for cooperating teachers and principals of internship schools, with the participation of students and internship instructors in order to negotiate the ideas and cooperate between executive personnel of practical teaching course. The head of teacher training center should encourage the participants morally and pecuniary.

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