

EFFECTIVENESS OF INTERNAL TEACHING PRACTICE IN THE PREPARATION OF PRE-SERVICE SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHERS

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ABSTRACT

Internal teaching practice is a basic component in teacher education for pre-service teachers which enables them to apply the theory they learned to teaching in real practice before joining external teaching practicum. The purpose of the present study was to investigate the effectiveness of the internal teaching practice for preparation of pre-service special education teachers. A quantitative survey research design was used and a total of 98 pre-service special education teachers from universities in Central and Southern Punjab of Pakistan. The research instrument used was a self-developed close-ended questionnaire with five-point Likert scale. The instrument showed high internal consistency evaluated through Cronbach's alpha coefficient value (0.82). The data was analyzed using descriptive statistics; frequencies, percentages, means and standard deviations including the Independent Samples t-test to compare the perceptions of the respondents based on gender. The results revealed a moderate level effectiveness of internal teaching practice ($M = 3.00$, $SD = 0.32$). Model lessons and supervisory support were seen as some of the weaker aspects of internal teaching practice, while the departmental arrangements were considered as the strongest aspect. In addition, respondents recognized the positive impact of feedback and teaching practice by internal staff on classroom management and teaching skills. Further, there was no statistically significant difference between male and female respondents on their perceptions of effectiveness of internal teaching practice ($p > .05$). The study findings showed that internal teaching practice is indeed one of the significant components that can be used to prepare prospective special educators, but it needs various facilitating factors such as supervisory support, provision of models, evaluation, and constructive feedback for it to be effective. The results have implications for teacher education institutions interested in enhancing the quality of internal practice of their special education programs.

KEYWORDS: Internal teaching practice, pre-service teachers, special education, teacher education, supervisory support, professional competence

INTRODUCTION

Education systems all over the world have come to understand that quality teaching is a cornerstone of improving student learning and fostering inclusive and equitable education; the landscape of teacher education has therefore changed significantly over the past 20 years (Chand, 2024). The success of an education system is not only related to curriculum reforms and to the resources available in the institution, but also to the professional preparation of teachers who are able to successfully convert educational theory into effective classroom practice in accordance with the hard work they have put into their preparation (Moore, 2014). As a result, teacher preparation institutions have transitioned from a knowledge-focused to competency-based teacher preparation, which is grounded in reflective learning, hands-on experiences, and lifelong learning (Smith, 2015). This change emphasizes that effective teachers are not only taught, but they are also taught by being given opportunities to, and provided feedback from, their practice; by

reflecting on what they have done; and by taking the time to constantly improve their practice prior to entering the profession (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017).

It is widely acknowledged that teaching practice is the foundation of pre-service teacher education, as it provides prospective teachers with the opportunity to put the knowledge of pedagogy into practice in authentic teaching contexts (Nilsson, 2008). Pre-service teachers enhance their instructional abilities, gain confidence in delivering lessons, enhance classroom communication, and learn to respond to a variety of academic and behavioral needs of learners through teaching practice (Bower et al., 2011). Practical teaching experiences are essential to connect the learning in the university classroom to the real classroom, allowing prospective teachers to convert theoretical learning into actual competence (Lunenberg & Korthagen, 2009). Therefore, in both developed and developing countries, teaching practice has become integral part of the teacher education curriculum (Westbrook et al., 2013).

The internal teaching practice is the first phase of practical professional training carried out in teacher education departments prior to school-based practicum among the various aspects of teaching practice (Gujjar et al., 2011). Unlike external teaching practice, which is conducted in schools, internal teaching practice offers pre-service teachers' chances to observe model lessons, microteaching, peer teaching, lesson demonstration, classroom simulation and reflective discussion with teacher educators. This supportive learning environment allows for the opportunity to experiment with various teaching methods, develop a lesson plan, get constructive feedback, and build confidence in teaching before entering the classroom (Mergler & Tangen, 2010).

To ensure effective internal teaching practice, its implementation should be good and required as a mandatory part of teacher training courses (Mahara, 2024). Internal teaching practice program is well organized and has a systematic supervision, a collaborative program, lesson observation, continuous performance evaluation, and constructive feedback. Through these experiences, pre-service teachers gain insight into their strengths and weaknesses as teachers, improve lesson planning, increase interaction with students, and feel more confident in their teaching duties (Aseltine et al., 2006). In addition, model lessons with competent teacher educators provide prospective teachers the opportunity to see good practices in teaching and learning; classroom management; questioning; and the involvement of learners before putting them into practice themselves (Phelps & Spitzer, 2012).

Internal teaching practice gains more importance in preparing teachers for special education since the roles of special education teachers differ from those of general education teachers (Tzivinikou, 2015). Pre-service special education teachers should be prepared to develop specialized knowledge and skills to teach children with various types of disabilities, modify instruction, create Individualized Education Programs (IEPs), work with other professionals and parents in an inclusive classroom, and be well-equipped to serve as a partner to the general education class teacher (Rabi et al., 2018). The skills are not acquired through the classroom, but only through ongoing guided practice, supervision, and feedback from a professional. The process of teaching and learning within the classroom is therefore, an important moment in the lives of prospective teachers to build their own confidence, strengthen their teaching skills and prepare for the real situation in a special education classroom (Stahl et al., 2016).

Supervision, constructive feedback, and reflective practice are repeatedly recognized as critical factors for the success of teacher preparation in the contemporary literature (Calderhead & Gates, 2003). Supervision in the modern sense of the word is no longer simply a form of assessment of teaching but recognized as an experience of learning together as professionals who can involve reflection, critical analysis and ongoing development. Effective supervisors assist pre-service teachers in the preparation of lessons, classroom organization, instructional decision-making and self-evaluation, and give prompt feedback that can help pre-service teachers grow as professionals (Stahl et al., 2018). It has been found that teachers in training who are supervised and provided with feedback on a regular basis are more competent, knowledgeable about pedagogy and confident as professionals than those who are supported in a less frequent and less positive manner (Caires & Almeida, 2007). Reflective practice also motivates Prospective Teachers to critically reflect on their experiences in the classroom, analyses their instructional decisions, consider what went well and what needs improvement, and then use that analysis to inform future lessons, promoting lifelong learning (Sellars, 2017).

Although teaching practice is vital in teacher education, the previous studies have been mainly concerned with external practicum, school internship and field-based teaching experiences (White & Forgasz, 2016). Far less research has been conducted into the effectiveness of internal teaching practice, especially in the context of teacher preparation for special education. There is a lack of evidence that provides a clear understanding of how the various attributes of departmental arrangements, model lessons, lessons planning, classroom management experiences, supervisory support, classroom observation, evaluation procedures, feedback mechanisms, collectively contribute to the preparation of prospective special education teachers before going on external school placements. This divide emphasizes the need to explore further the quality and effectiveness of internal teaching practice (Juarez & Purper, 2018).

Internal teaching practice has been included as an integral part of teacher education in Pakistan to connect theory with practice for teachers. But, in terms of implementation, supervisory support, instructional materials and assessment methods, learning experiences for pre-service teachers can vary (Masood et al., 2022). Hence, there is a need for

systematic internal evaluation of teaching practice for the identification of institutional strengths and areas for improvement. This evidence can help teacher education institutions to reinforce their internal teaching practice and improve the professional training of future special education teachers (Harrison et al., 2022).

In light of this, the present study titled "Evaluation of the Effectiveness of Internal Teaching Practice in Pre-Service Special Education Teachers" was carried out to examine the effectiveness of the internal teaching practice from the pre-service special education teachers' points of view. Specifically, the study focuses on departmental arrangements, model lessons, supervisory support, classroom observation, evaluation procedures, feedback mechanisms, lesson planning, and classroom management experiences. The results should yield empirical evidence to feed into the improvement of teacher education programs and enhance teacher preparation for future special educators.

Background of the Study

Teacher education is seen as a pivotal element in educational development as it is the process of equipping prospective teachers with the knowledge, skills and attitudes they need for effective classroom practice (Schwille et al., 2007). Literature explains that educational reforms focus on competency-based teacher preparation, which emphasizes combining theory with actual teaching practice to enhance the quality of teaching (Bader & Hamada, 2015). In previous studies, the teaching practice has been emphasized as a pedagogical bridge between the university coursework and the actual practice in classrooms where prospective teachers could find opportunities to put pedagogical theories into practice in authentic classroom settings. In this process, pre-service teachers acquired confidence, improved teaching and learning skills, and got practical experience of how to deal with classroom management and interaction (McDonald et al., 2014).

Internal teaching practice was regarded as the first phase of practical teacher training, which took place inside teacher training institutions before prospective teachers went to externed schools (Musset, 2010). It offered a structured learning context in which pre-service teachers experienced model lessons, microteaching, peer teaching, lesson demonstration, simulation of classroom activities, and supervised instructional activities (Kelleci Alkan et al., 2024). Through these experiences prospective teachers had the opportunity to enhance their lesson planning, classroom communication, instructional delivery and teaching strategies with the assistance of teacher educators (Fernandez, 2010). The positive nature of the internal teaching practice also enabled the prospective teachers to identify their strengths and weaknesses in teaching, and to refine their techniques and gain their confidence prior to entering the real classroom (Feiman-Nemser, 2001).

The impact of internal teaching practice was shown to be heavily reliant on the quality of its organization and implementation (Tavares et al., 2017). Previous research indicated that a combination of well-designed departmental structures, model lessons, classroom observations, ongoing supervision, performance evaluation and constructive feedback led to meaningful professional learning experiences. The supervisors had a great influence on guiding prospective teachers throughout the teaching process, they identified areas that need to be improved and assisted prospective teachers to engage in reflective practice (Foong et al., 2018). Similarly, feedback helped prospective teachers adjust their teaching strategies, enhance their delivery of instruction and reinforce their classroom management before they started to teach outside (Greenberg et al., 2014).

The process of internal teaching practice was particularly significant for preparation of the pre-service special education teachers (Nonis & Jernice, 2011). The literature suggested that instruction of learners with disabilities involved special instructional practices, individualized planning, effective communication strategies, classroom modifications, and working cooperatively with families and other professionals in various disciplines (Polloway et al., 2001). Therefore, theoretical instruction was not enough to equip prospective special education teachers for professional roles (Mastropieri et al., 2011). Internal teaching practice thus offered opportunities to observe the effective practices, practice the teaching techniques, receive continuous monitoring, and become more prepared to work in inclusive and special education classrooms (McLeskey et al., 2017).

While internal teaching practice was recognized as an integral part of teacher education programs, most of the previous research was related to the external teaching practice and school-based practicum experiences. There were comparatively few studies that considered the effectiveness of internal teaching practice in teacher education institutions, especially in special education (Hussain & Mahmood, 2010). The literature also indicated that differences in departmental structure, supervision, assessment and feedback systems were related to the quality of learning experiences offered prospective teachers (Griffiths et al., 2021). In Pakistan, universities with special education programs integrated teaching practice as a part of their teacher education programs but there was not much empirical evidence to validate the effectiveness of teaching practice (Juarez & Purper, 2018). Hence, the need to assess the effectiveness of the internal teaching practice was felt to gather information about the strengths of the institution, highlight the areas in need of improvement and act as a proof of the effectiveness of the teaching practice for enhancing the teacher education programs. This evidence should assist teacher educators, curriculum developers and policy makers to enhance the training of future special education teachers.

Statement of the Problem

Teaching practice is seen to be one of the most significant aspects of teacher education which allow pre-service teachers to apply the theoretical learning to the actual classroom setting (Larbi & Kuranchie, 2018). It includes a number of aspects including internal teaching practice, during which it was intended that the prospective teachers should have the opportunity to experience some model lessons, receive supervisory guidance, develop their lesson plans, enhance their classroom management and develop their teaching skills prior to external school placements (Nguyen, 2009). While previous studies have recognized the importance of teaching practice in teacher preparation, most studies were done on the external practicum and school-based teaching experiences, and relatively few examined the effectiveness of internal teaching practice in the preparation of pre-service special education teachers (Lawson et al., 2015). Besides, there was not enough empirical evidence about the sufficiency of departmental arrangements, supervisory support, evaluation process and feedback in internal teaching practice in teacher education institutions (Esterhazy et al., 2021). The absence of evidence hindered the ability to fully understand whether or not teaching practice within the school environment is sufficient to prepare prospective special education teachers for their professional roles (McLeskey & Billingsley, 2008). Given the above, the present study was conducted to assess the effectiveness of internal teaching practice in pre-service special education teachers' teacher preparation and to offer empirical evidence that could help enhance teacher training practices and increase the quality of special education teacher preparation programs.

Objective of the Study

The objectives of the Study were:

1. To assess the level of effectiveness of the internal teaching practice that is used in the training of pre-service special education teachers.
2. To investigate the effectiveness of the arrangements such as model lessons, supervisory support, evaluation procedures and feedback in departmental arrangements as experienced by pre-service special education teachers in terms of internal teaching practice.
3. To compare the perception of male and female pre-service special education teacher about the effectiveness of internal teaching practice.

Research Questions

The questions of the study were:

1. What is the level of effectiveness of internal teaching practice in the preparation of pre-service special education teachers?
2. How effective are the departmental arrangements, model lessons, supervisory support, evaluation procedures, and feedback during internal teaching practice as experienced by pre-service special education teachers?
3. Does the effectiveness of internal teaching practice differ between male and female pre-service special education teachers?

Significance of the Study

The present study is important since it assesses the effectiveness of internal teaching practice in the preparation of pre-service special education teachers. Internal teaching practice is a pivotal part of teacher preparation that affords potential teachers a chance to acquire practical teaching skills through model lessons, supervised teaching, classroom observation, assessment and feedback before moving on to actual teaching placements. Assessment of the effectiveness of these experiences is necessary as they are vital to the preparation of the next generation of special education teachers for teaching and instruction responsibilities they face. The results of this study give empirical evidence of teacher education institutions' internal teaching practice that still has weaknesses in its implementation.

This study has implications for teacher education institutions, university departments and teacher trainers for providing evidence on the effectiveness of the departmental arrangements, model lesson, supervisory support, evaluation process and feedback process in internal teaching practice. The findings can help the universities to examine and strengthen their teaching practice procedures internally, improve the supervisory processes and enhance the quality of pre-service special education teachers' practical teaching experiences. In addition, the results can inform curriculum designers of the teacher training curriculum in how it needs to be improved to ensure that the preparation time is sufficient prior to external teaching practice.

The study is also useful for the planners, monitors and quality assurance officers of teacher education programs. The findings of this study can be used to develop policies and institutional guidelines for better organization, supervision and evaluation of the internal teaching practice. Improving these aspects can contribute to teacher preparation programs for special education that are high quality and have the ability to produce effective teachers who can meet the educational needs of a diverse population of learners with disabilities.

Furthermore, this research is a useful contribution to the existing literature on teacher preparation for special education by offering context-specific evidence that will help to determine the effectiveness of internal teaching practice in teacher education institutions. The findings will be useful in filling an important gap in the literature as relatively few studies have focused on this aspect of teacher preparation in special education. The study can also be useful reference for future study, future researcher in teaching practice and teacher preparation, as well as for future study in special education, and can be used to give practical recommendations to enhance the internal teaching practice and enhance the quality of teaching special education preservice teacher.

Conceptual Farmwork of the Study

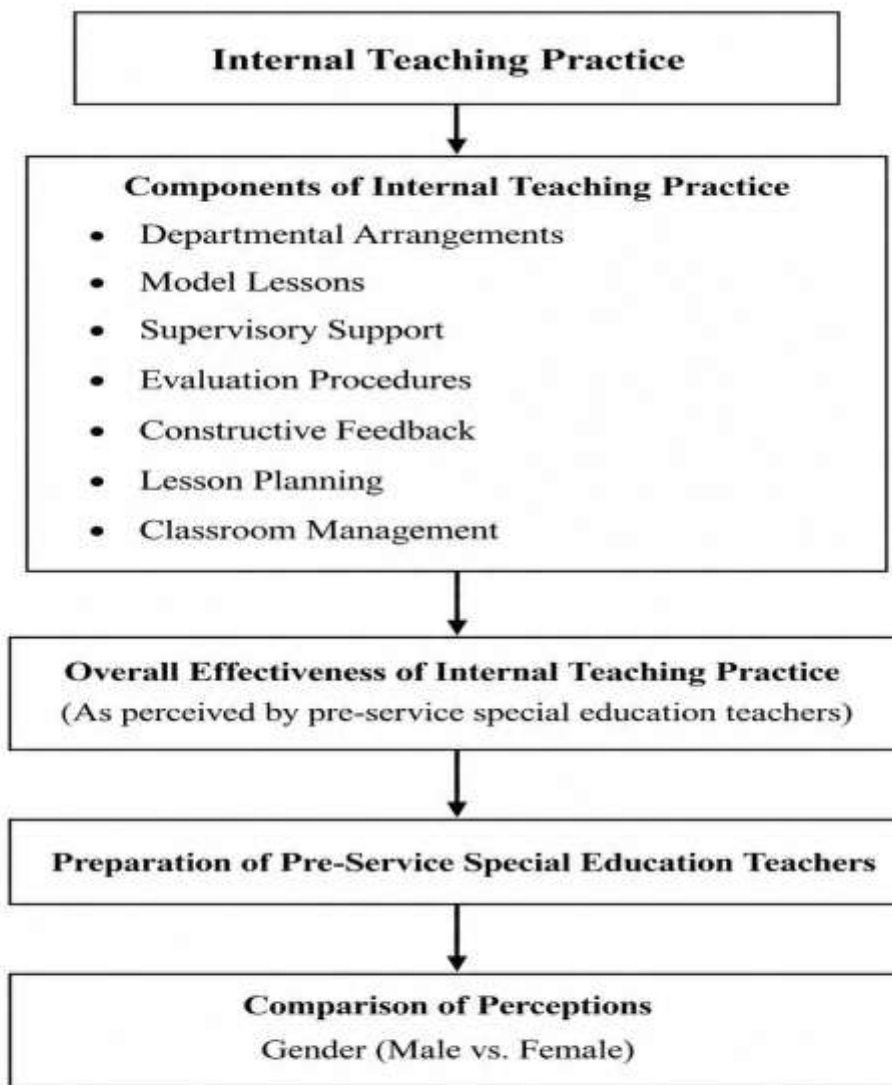


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework of the Study

The conceptual model of this study shows the concept of the relationship between the main components of internal teaching practice and pre-service special education teachers' preparation. It is based on the idea that the effectiveness of internal teaching practice is related to certain aspects such as departmental arrangement, model lessons, supervisory support, assessment methods, feedback, lesson planning and classroom management. Together, they illustrate the quality of the internal teaching practice that the pre-service special education teachers have experienced in their professional preparation. These components are also proposed to assist in making the teaching in the school effective, which in turn can help in the preparation of pre-service special education teachers. The arrangement of departments, quality model lessons, constant monitoring, systematic feedback and constructive guidance offer prospective teachers

the chance to refine their teaching practices, bolster lesson planning skills, reinforce classroom management techniques, and build confidence prior to their external teaching practices.

Lastly, the framework suggests differences in perception of the effectiveness of internal teaching practice between males and females. Thus, the study investigates the perception of male and female pre-service special education teachers in order to find out whether there was any significant difference in their perception of internal teaching practice. In general, the conceptual framework serves as a theoretical foundation for the understanding of the effectiveness of internal teaching practice and its role in the preparation of pre-service special education teachers.

METHODOLOGY

This study took a quantitative survey research design to test the effectiveness of internal teaching practice for the preparation of pre-service special education teachers. Students of the study were pre-service special education teachers of public and private universities in Lahore, Multan and Bahawalpur of Punjab. The participants were selected using simple random sampling technique. A close-ended questionnaire, on a five-point Likert scale, was self-developed to collect data. The questionnaire was content-validated by experts who have expertise in Special Education. The data collected were analyzed with the aid of the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Descriptive statistics such as frequencies, percentages, mean scores and standard deviations were used to see the effectiveness of internal teaching practice; on the other hand, independent samples t-test was used to compare the perceptions of male and female pre-service special education teachers.

Research Design

The study adopted quantitative survey research design to assess effectiveness of internal teaching practice on pre-service special education teachers' preparation. The survey design was seen suitable for the researcher to collect quantitative data from the relatively large number of respondents concerning their experiences and perceptions of the teaching practice within the classroom. The design allowed for a structured analysis of different internal aspects of teaching and learning, such as the structure of teacher's groups, model lessons, supervising support, assessment, constructive feedback, planning, and classroom management. In addition, it offered empirical data on the efficacy of IP for training prospective special education teachers for teaching jobs.

Population of the Study

The population of the study was pre-service special education teachers from teacher education programs of public and private universities of Lahore, Multan and Bahawalpur, Punjab. The prospective teachers were the ones who had participated in the internal teaching practice in their teacher education programs and were suitable respondents to evaluate the effectiveness of internal teaching practice.

Sampling

The pre-service special education teachers were selected through simple random sampling technique from public and private universities in Lahore, Multan and Bahawalpur. All potential teachers were given an equal chance to be in the study. The respondents were selected from different teacher education institutions providing Special Education program (see table 1 for detail).

Table 1: Sampling Size of the Study

Name of University	Sample
The Islamia University of Bahawalpur	26
University of the Punjab, Lahore	22
University of Management and Technology (UMT), Lahore	13
University of Education, Lahore	11
Bahauddin Zakariya University, Multan	14
University of Southern Punjab, Multan	12
Total	98

Research Tool of the Study

The data were obtained using a self-made close-ended questionnaire with a five-point Likert scale that ranged from Strongly Disagree (1) to Strongly Agree (5). The questionnaire was specially designed to assess the effectiveness of the internal teaching practice for the preparation of pre-service special education teachers. It consisted of 11 items

related to significant aspects of internal teaching practice such as departmental arrangements, model lessons, supervisory support, formative assessment, constructive feedback, lesson planning, classroom management, etc. Content validity was determined by having the questionnaire read and judged by experts in the field of Special Education for relevance, clarity and appropriateness of the items. They were asked to make suggestions and these were taken on board prior to the final administration of the instrument. Following this a pilot survey was carried out to evaluate the reliability of the questionnaire. The instrument showed good internal consistency with Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of 0.82 indicating that the questionnaire was reliable and suitable for data collection for the current study.

Data Collection Procedure

Formal permission was taken from the respective Universities before data collection. The study purpose was explained to the respondents and informed consent was obtained prior to giving of the questionnaire. The study was voluntary and all participants were assured that the information they provided would be confidential and that it would only be used for research purposes. The pre-service special education teachers were selected and administered the self-developed close-ended questionnaire which was administered in person. All questionnaires were then checked after completion for completeness, coded and entered into the SPSS for statistical analysis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This part discusses the outcomes from the analysis of data according to the study's objectives. In determining the effectiveness of internal teaching practice as perceived by the pre-service special education teachers, descriptive statistics; frequency, percentage, mean and standard deviation were used. An independent samples t-test was then used to analyze the difference between male and female respondents' perceptions.

Table 4.1 Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents (N = 98)

Variable	Category	<i>f</i>	%
Gender	Male	71	72.4
	Female	27	27.6
Area	Southern Punjab	52	53.1
	Central Punjab	46	46.9

Table 4.1 present the number of pre-service special education teachers analyzed was 98. In terms of gender, 71 (72.4%) were males and 27 (27.6%) were females, with males representing the majority of the study sample. As far as geographical representation is concerned 52 respondents (53.1%) were from Southern Punjab and 46 (46.9%) were from Central Punjab. The even distribution between the two regions suggests that students from both areas were included in the study, which resulted in more representative sample of the students studying special education in teacher educational institutions of Punjab. The sample was skewed towards male participants, but some female participants from Southern and Central Punjab were included to add diversity in their perspectives on the effectiveness of internal teaching practice.

Table 4.2 Descriptive Statistics of the Effectiveness of Internal Teaching Practice as Perceived by Pre-Service Special Education Teachers

Statement	SDA <i>f</i> (%)	DA <i>f</i> (%)	UN <i>f</i> (%)	A <i>f</i> (%)	SA <i>f</i> (%)	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Internal teaching practice is properly conducted within the department.	38 (38.8)	48 (49.0)	0 (0.0)	12 (12.2)	0 (0.0)	1.86	0.93
Model lessons were provided before practice teaching.	0 (0.0)	86 (87.8)	3 (3.1)	3 (3.1)	6 (6.1)	2.28	0.80
The department made suitable arrangements for internal teaching practice.	6 (6.1)	26 (26.5)	3 (3.1)	31 (31.6)	32 (32.7)	3.58	1.35
Teachers identified areas for improvement during internal teaching practice.	0 (0.0)	36 (36.7)	31 (31.6)	19 (19.4)	12 (12.2)	3.07	1.03

Statement	SDAf (%)	DAf (%)	UNf (%)	Af (%)	SAf (%)	M	SD
Teachers observed and evaluated prospective teachers during internal teaching practice.	3 (3.1)	16 (16.3)	23 (23.5)	31 (31.6)	25 (25.5)	3.60	1.13
Teaching practice supervisors participated in the evaluation process.	6 (6.1)	40 (40.8)	3 (3.1)	49 (50.0)	0 (0.0)	2.97	1.08
Teachers provided constructive feedback during internal teaching practice.	0 (0.0)	95 (96.9)	3 (3.1)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	2.03	0.17
Internal teaching practice improved lesson planning skills.	27 (27.6)	37 (37.8)	6 (6.1)	14 (14.3)	14 (14.3)	2.50	1.40
Supervisors were available to provide support during internal teaching practice.	39 (39.8)	26 (26.5)	0 (0.0)	17 (17.3)	16 (16.3)	2.44	1.55
Feedback helped prospective teachers to improve their teaching skills.	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	35 (35.7)	63 (64.3)	4.64	0.48
Internal teaching practice enhanced classroom management skills.	12 (12.2)	0 (0.0)	3 (3.1)	40 (40.8)	43 (43.9)	4.04	1.26

Table 4.1 shows that the descriptive statistics for the pre-service special education teachers' views on the effectiveness of internal teaching practice. The overall mean score ($M = 3.00$, $SD = 0.32$) showed that the internal teaching practice was perceived as having a moderate level of effectiveness and therefore there was still a need for improvement in several aspects.

The statement that received the highest mean score, "Feedback helped prospective teachers improve their teaching skills" ($M = 4.64$, $SD = 0.48$), shows that teachers strongly agreed with the statement. Similarly, internal teaching practice was found to have a positive influence on the development of classroom management abilities with a high mean score of "Internal teaching practice enhanced classroom management skills" ($M = 4.04$, $SD = 1.26$). In addition, respondents showed positive attitudes towards departmental arrangements for internal teaching practice ($M = 3.58$; $SD = 1.35$) and the observation and evaluation of classrooms by teachers ($M = 3.60$; $SD = 1.13$), indicating that these teaching and learning practices are implemented well.

Other components, on the other hand, had relatively low mean scores which showed that there were some weaknesses in the implementation of internal teaching practice. The respondents also indicated low levels of agreement that internal teaching practice was carried out appropriately in the department ($M = 1.86$, $SD = 0.93$), that model lessons were provided prior to internal teaching practice ($M = 2.28$, $SD = 0.80$), that teachers gave constructive feedback during internal teaching practice ($M = 2.03$, $SD = 0.17$), that lessons planning skills were sufficiently enhanced ($M = 2.50$, $SD = 1.40$), and that supervisors were available to support teachers during internal teaching practice ($M = 2.44$, $SD = 1.55$). The results indicate that while some aspects of internal teaching practice were in place, there were significant gaps in supervision, instructional support, and organization of practical teaching experiences.

Meanwhile, teachers' identification of areas to improve, $M = 3.07$, $SD = 1.03$; and teaching practice supervisors' involvement in evaluation, $M = 2.97$, $SD = 1.08$, were rated at moderate level, suggesting that they are not consistent when the practices are implemented in the institutions. The greater standard deviations for a select few items also indicated that there were different experiences among the respondents, which indicated differences in the quality of internal teaching practices of the participating universities.

The results showed overall that internal teaching practice was a useful means to enhance classroom management, to receive feedback on teaching and to engage in supervised teaching. The overall effectiveness score, however, was moderate and requires attention to better support the implementation of the departments, increase the level of support for supervision, provide more opportunities for the students to experience model lessons, and strengthen the guidance of lesson planning to better ensure the quality of in-house teaching and learning for pre-service special education teachers.

Table 4.3 Perceived Effectiveness of Specific Departmental Arrangements During Internal Teaching Practice (N = 98)

Departmental Arrangement	Questionnaire Item(s)	Mean (M)	Perceived Level
Model Lessons	ITP2	2.28	Low

Departmental Arrangement	Questionnaire Item(s)	Mean (<i>M</i>)	Perceived Level
Departmental Arrangements	ITP3	3.58	High
Evaluation Procedures	ITP4, ITP5	3.34	Moderate
Supervisory Support	ITP6, ITP9	2.71	Moderate
Feedback	ITP7, ITP10	3.34	Moderate

Table 4.3 presents the perceived effectiveness of specific departmental arrangements implemented during internal teaching practice. The outcomes indicated that departmental arrangements received the highest mean score ($M = 3.58$), reflecting a high level of perceived effectiveness. This suggests that respondents generally believed that their departments made appropriate organizational arrangements to facilitate internal teaching practice.

The effectiveness of evaluation procedures was rated at a moderate level ($M = 3.34$), indicating that classroom observation, performance evaluation, and the identification of areas for improvement were implemented to a reasonable extent during internal teaching practice. Similarly, feedback practices also obtained a moderate mean score ($M = 3.34$), suggesting that feedback contributed to the development of teaching skills, although its consistency and quality may have varied across respondents.

In contrast, supervisory support received a comparatively lower mean score ($M = 2.71$), indicating that the availability and involvement of supervisors during internal teaching practice were perceived as only moderately effective. The lowest mean score was reported for model lessons ($M = 2.28$), demonstrating that respondents perceived limited opportunities to observe demonstration lessons prior to commencing teaching practice. Since model lessons provide practical examples of effective instructional strategies, their limited availability may reduce prospective teachers' preparedness before entering classroom practice.

Overall, the outcomes suggest that while departmental arrangements and evaluation practices were perceived relatively positively, improvements are required in the provision of model lessons and supervisory support to enhance the overall effectiveness of internal teaching practice. Strengthening these components may contribute to better professional preparation and greater teaching competence among pre-service special education teachers.

Table 4.4 Comparison of Male and Female Pre-Service Special Education Teachers' Perceptions Regarding the Effectiveness of Internal Teaching Practice (N = 98)

Item	Male ($n = 71$) $M \pm SD$	Female ($n = 27$) $M \pm SD$	t	p
Internal teaching practice is properly conducted within the department.	1.90 ± 0.97	1.74 ± 0.81	0.76	.448
Model lessons were provided before practice teaching.	2.25 ± 0.77	2.33 ± 0.88	-0.44	.660
The department made suitable arrangements for internal teaching practice.	3.48 ± 1.36	3.85 ± 1.29	-1.23	.222
Teachers identified areas for improvement during internal teaching practice.	3.07 ± 1.00	3.07 ± 1.11	-0.02	.988
Teachers observed and evaluated prospective teachers during internal teaching practice.	3.54 ± 1.19	3.78 ± 0.93	-0.95	.344
Teaching practice supervisors participated in the evaluation process.	2.99 ± 1.10	2.93 ± 1.04	0.24	.807
Teachers provided constructive feedback during internal teaching practice.	2.04 ± 0.20	2.00 ± 0.00	1.08	.283
Internal teaching practice improved lesson planning skills.	2.41 ± 1.37	2.74 ± 1.48	-1.05	.297
Supervisors were available to provide support during internal teaching practice.	2.45 ± 1.61	2.41 ± 1.39	0.12	.902

Item	Male (<i>n</i> = 71) <i>M</i> ± <i>SD</i>	Female (<i>n</i> = 27) <i>M</i> ± <i>SD</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Feedback helped prospective teachers improve their teaching skills.	4.66 ± 0.48	4.59 ± 0.50	0.64	.527
Internal teaching practice enhanced classroom management skills.	3.92 ± 1.31	4.37 ± 1.08	-1.61	.111

Table 4.4 presents the comparison of male and female pre-service special education teachers' perceptions regarding the effectiveness of internal teaching practice. The outcomes revealed that no statistically significant gender differences were observed across any of the eleven statements, as all obtained *p*-values were greater than the .05 level of significance. These results indicate that male and female respondents held largely comparable perceptions regarding the effectiveness of internal teaching practice and its contribution to their professional preparation.

Although no significant differences were identified, slight variations in mean scores were observed across several items. Female respondents reported comparatively higher mean scores for the departmental arrangements made for internal teaching practice (*M* = 3.85, *SD* = 1.29) than male respondents (*M* = 3.48, *SD* = 1.36). Similarly, female respondents expressed slightly more positive perceptions regarding classroom observation and evaluation by teachers (*M* = 3.78, *SD* = 0.93), the improvement of lesson planning skills (*M* = 2.74, *SD* = 1.48), and the enhancement of classroom management skills (*M* = 4.37, *SD* = 1.08) compared with their male counterparts. However, these differences were not statistically significant, suggesting that they represented normal variations in responses rather than meaningful gender-based differences.

Conversely, male respondents reported marginally higher mean scores on several aspects, including the proper conduct of internal teaching practice within the department (*M* = 1.90, *SD* = 0.97), supervisors' involvement in the evaluation process (*M* = 2.99, *SD* = 1.10), the availability of supervisory support (*M* = 2.45, *SD* = 1.61), and the effectiveness of feedback in improving teaching skills (*M* = 4.66, *SD* = 0.48). Nevertheless, the observed differences remained statistically non-significant (*p* > .05), indicating that both male and female respondents evaluated these aspects in a similar manner.

Overall, the outcomes suggest that gender did not significantly influence respondents' perceptions of the effectiveness of internal teaching practice. Both male and female pre-service special education teachers demonstrated comparable views regarding departmental arrangements, supervisory support, evaluation procedures, feedback practices, lesson planning, and classroom management. This consistency across gender groups indicates that the implementation and perceived benefits of internal teaching practice were experienced similarly by prospective teachers regardless of gender, reflecting a relatively uniform training environment within the participating institutions.

DISCUSSION

The present study aimed to assess the effectiveness of the internal teaching practice in the preparation of pre-service special education teachers. The overall effectiveness of internal teaching practice was found to be at a moderate level, with many opportunities for professional learning but there were areas that need improvements. The results of the study are in line with previous studies that highlight the importance of theory and systematic practical activities, supervision, and reflection in teaching practice (Stenberg et al., 2016). Effectiveness is moderate, so it is possible that the school did not use these components in the same way in all its institutions.

The internal teaching practice in terms of aspect was high in agreement and the aspect of departmental arrangements was found to have the highest score. This result aligns with the findings of Mathews (2023) who state that a well-organized teaching practice is the basis for the professional preparation of prospective teachers. By contrast, supervisory support, model lessons and feedback practices were rated comparatively lower, thus pointing to areas that need to be further improved. The results align with the Grima-Farrell (2015) which revealed that supervision and ongoing mentoring play an important role in building the competence of pre-service teachers and their confidence in teaching practices.

The results also indicated that the internal teaching practice had positive impact in developing the skill of classroom management and the respondents strongly emphasized the importance of the feedback in improving teaching skills. The findings are in line with earlier research which has found that guided practice, classroom observation, and constructive feedback allow prospective teachers to shape and improve their teaching skills, and build confidence in the classroom before entering the actual teaching environment (Stahl et al., 2016). However, there were some concerns that the consistency of these practices is not the best due to relatively low ratings in model lessons and supervisory support, which could affect the overall effectiveness of internal teaching practice.

A comparison was also made between the male and female students' perception about the effectiveness of the internal teaching practice. An independent-samples t-test found no significant difference between males and females on all of

the study variables. This finding indicates that the two groups had similar experiences of internal teaching practice, similar understandings of how this practice benefited and challenged them and similar understandings of what benefits and challenges might arise from it. The lack of significant differences between men and women suggests that there may have been some influences of institutional practice on the respondents' perceptions of internal teaching practice rather than gender.

Based on the results, it can be concluded that internal teaching practice has a significant role in preparing pre-service special education teachers, because it is seen that it has contributed to improve the ability to manage the class, reflective learning and professional development. However, there are areas that need to be enhanced to improve the quality and effectiveness of internal teaching practice, including improvements to supervisory support, the provision of model lessons and the feedback provided. Improvements in these elements will enable future educators to be more equipped to respond to the instructional and professional needs of special education classrooms.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of the study, the following conclusions were drawn:

- The teaching practice that was conducted internally was found to be moderately effective on the aspect of pre-service special education teacher preparation for their profession.
- The departmental arrangements for conducting internal teaching practice were satisfactory in general and it was observed that institutions provided an organized environment for practice teaching.
- Model lessons were seen as inadequate and students who were about to teach had little opportunity to see good teaching before putting themselves in the classroom.
- The supervisory support and evaluation methods were found to be moderately effective, and the supervisory process needs to be strengthened in the classroom and the internal teaching practice process.
- Constructive feedback was identified as a key enrichment tool for the teachers' skills, but was not always scheduled frequently and regularly.
- In general, internal teaching practice was perceived as having a positive impact on the acquisition of some important teaching skills such as lesson plan and classroom management skills, which are basic competencies in effective teaching of special education.
- The perceptions of the female and male pre-service special education teachers did not differ statistically in terms of the effectiveness of internal teaching practice and hence they benefit and face the problems in similar manner.
- The results indicate that the overall quality of model lessons, supervisory support, assessment of lessons, and feedback to teachers can be improved to increase the success of prospective special education teachers in classroom practice and the effectiveness of internal teaching practice.

Implications of the Study

- Teacher education departments should enhance the implementation of teaching practice internally, so that the trainees can have systematic and meaningful practical teaching experience before going to the external practicum.
- Model lessons should be held regularly to give prospective teachers opportunities to observe good teaching, classroom organization, and teaching techniques prior to practice teaching.
- Supervisory support can be improved by implementing the continuous observation, mentoring and professional guidance for the whole internal teaching practice process to ensure supervisors' active involvement in the process.
- Additional, structured and timely constructive feedback should enable prospective teachers to recognize their strengths and plan how to minimize their weaknesses in instruction, and to constantly improve their teaching.
- Evaluation should highlight reflective practice, establishing clear performance criteria and frequent classroom observations for the professional development of future teachers.
- The training activities that teacher education institutions have to offer should continue to build up the key competencies of teaching that were determined as outcomes of internal teaching practice, such as lesson planning and classroom management.
- Based on the finding that there was no significant difference in the two genders, institutions can adopt uniform teaching practice policies and procedures internally that will give teachers of both genders equal opportunities to learn.
- The results can help curriculum planners, school administrators and policymakers evaluate and enhance internal teaching practice policies to better equip future special education teachers with the ability to address the needs of students with disabilities.

Limitations of the Study

There are some limitations to the present study that need to be taken into consideration in the interpretation of the study's results. The study was conducted with pre-service special education teachers studying at selected universities of Central and Southern Punjab and cannot be generalized to all the teacher education institutions across Pakistan. Secondly, this study only considered the effect of internal teaching practice and neglected to investigate the effect of external teaching practice and internship experience of teacher training. In addition, the survey research design used in the study was quantitative and data was gathered using a closed-ended questionnaire, meaning that qualitative evidence gathered from the focus group discussion, classroom observation, and interviews were not included in the findings. Other demographic factors which could impact perceptions were not explored, and in addition gender was the only demographic factor examined in order to make comparisons. Last, however, a cross-sectional design was used, and perceptions at one specific moment in time were most representative of respondents than change in perceptions over time. While there are some limitations, the study offers useful information about the effectiveness of teaching practice in special education and a solid base for further research in teacher education for special education.

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