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Teaching Practice in Teacher Education: Conceptual Underpinnings, Structural Models, and Significance for Professional Identity Formation among B.Ed. Student Teachers in Rajasthan

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ABSTRACT

Teaching practice — the school-based practicum component of pre-service teacher education programmes — is widely regarded as the most significant and transformative component of the B.Ed. curriculum, the experiential crucible in which prospective teachers begin constructing the professional identity, practical wisdom, and contextualised pedagogical knowledge that distinguish a qualified teacher from an academically trained subject specialist. Despite its centrality, teaching practice as a concept remains theoretically underspecified in much Indian teacher education discourse, with insufficient attention to the conceptual frameworks that account for how teaching practice produces professional learning and the structural models through which it can be most effectively designed and supervised. This longitudinal study tracks professional identity development across four dimensions — teacher efficacy, professional commitment, adaptive teaching belief, and reflective practice — in 186 B.Ed. student teachers across three colleges affiliated to Rajasthan universities, at the start, midpoint, and end of a 20-week school-based teaching practice internship. All four dimensions showed significant progressive development across the three measurement points, with the largest absolute growth in reflective practice (start 38.8 → end 69.6, gain +30.8 pp) and the most rapid early-phase growth in teacher efficacy (start 52.4 → mid 64.8, gain +12.4 pp in first 10 weeks). The findings illuminate both the power and the necessary conditions of teaching practice as a professional identity formation process.

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KEYWORDS: *Teaching practice, Teacher education, Professional identity, B.Ed. programme, Practicum, Reflective practice, Teacher efficacy, Rajasthan, Pre-service teacher development*

INTRODUCTION

Teaching practice — variously termed practicum, school experience, field placement, or internship across different teacher education systems and traditions — is the component of initial teacher preparation that most directly embodies the experiential learning principles on which teacher education as a professional education enterprise must rest. The fundamental competency at stake — the ability to create conditions for student learning in the complex, dynamic, and irreducibly social environment of the classroom — cannot be developed through academic study of pedagogical theory alone, however rigorous, because it is a practice competency that is developed through the practice itself: through the repeated cycle of teaching, observing the learning consequences, reflecting on what happened and why, and adapting subsequent teaching in light of that reflection (1). This is the Kolbian cycle applied specifically to professional teaching learning — and teaching practice is its essential site.

The NCTE's 2014 revised B.Ed. regulations extended the teaching practice internship to a minimum of 20 weeks in schools, reflecting the policy recognition that the previous 40-day internship was insufficient for the depth of professional learning that effective teacher preparation requires (2). Yet the extension of internship duration alone cannot guarantee deeper professional learning unless the conceptual framework guiding the internship's structure, supervision, and reflective support is also developed — a dimension of teaching practice quality that receives insufficient attention in Indian teacher education research relative to the structural and regulatory dimensions (3).

This paper provides a conceptual review of teaching practice as an experiential and professional learning process, examining the theoretical frameworks that account for how and why classroom experience produces professional learning when adequately supported, the structural models through which teaching practice programmes can be most effectively organised, and the specific significance of teaching practice for professional identity formation — the development of a coherent, committed, and reflective teacher self that

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sustains professional practice over time. The conceptual review is complemented by longitudinal empirical data on professional identity development across a 20-week B.Ed. internship in Rajasthan.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The conceptual underpinnings of teaching practice as professional learning draw on multiple theoretical traditions. Schön's (1983) concept of reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action provides the foundational epistemological framework: the expert practitioner generates practice knowledge not through the application of academic theory to practice situations but through ongoing reflective engagement with the surprises and demands of practice itself, developing what Schön termed "knowledge-in-action" that is contextually anchored, tacit, and irreducible to propositional formulation (4). Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1999) extended this framework through the concept of "inquiry as stance" — the positioning of the teacher as a continuous researcher of their own practice — arguing that effective teaching practice supervision should develop this inquiry orientation as a durable professional habit rather than merely assessing surface teaching performance (5).

Structural Models of Teaching Practice

The literature identifies several structural models of teaching practice organisation with different implications for professional learning outcomes:

- Block placement model: student teachers complete all school placement time in one or two concentrated blocks, maximising immersion in school culture but limiting the opportunity for iterative campus-school dialogue about practice — the model most common in traditional Indian B.Ed. programmes.
- Concurrent model: school placement and campus coursework alternate on a weekly basis throughout the programme, enabling immediate connection between theory and practice but reducing the depth of school immersion and community integration in any single school.
- Professional development school model: student teachers are placed in designated partner schools with structured collaborative relationships between school and university, including co-planned curriculum development, joint research projects, and shared professional learning — the model with the strongest evidence base internationally but

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requiring substantial institutional investment (6).

- Integrated internship model: the NCTE 2014 framework's 20-week internship, in which student teachers assume progressively greater classroom responsibility over the placement period, moving from observation through assisted teaching to full lesson delivery and assessment responsibility — the model evaluated in this study.

Zeichner (2010) argued that the most critical structural feature of effective teaching practice is not the placement model itself but the quality of the "third space" created between university and school — the collaborative zone in which campus-based pedagogical knowledge and school-based practical knowledge are brought into genuine dialogue through co-planning, joint supervision, and shared reflection, rather than being maintained as separate and often mutually sceptical domains (7).

Teaching Practice and Professional Identity

Professional identity — the teacher's sense of who they are as a professional, what they believe about teaching and learning, and what kind of teacher they aspire to become — is both a product of teaching practice experience and a determinant of how that experience is interpreted and engaged with. Beauchamp and Thomas (2009) reviewed the teacher identity literature and argued that teaching practice is the primary site of professional identity formation in initial teacher education, as the prospective teacher's first sustained encounter with the full complexity of teaching work forces active identity reconstruction in relation to real students, real school cultures, and real professional expectations rather than imagined or theoretical ones (8).

RESEARCH GAP

Indian teacher education research has more extensively examined teaching practice's structural and regulatory dimensions than its professional identity formation dimensions, with limited longitudinal data tracking identity development trajectories across the full duration of the extended internship mandated by the NCTE 2014 regulations. This study provides longitudinal data on four professional identity dimensions across three measurement points in a Rajasthan B.Ed. context.

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OBJECTIVES

- To review the conceptual frameworks, structural models, and professional significance of teaching practice as an experiential learning process.
- To track professional identity development across four dimensions at the start, midpoint, and end of a 20-week B.Ed. internship.
- To assess whether different professional identity dimensions show different rates and trajectories of development across the internship period.
- To derive implications for teaching practice design and supervision in Rajasthan B.Ed. programmes.

METHODOLOGY

Study Design and Participants

A longitudinal survey design was employed with 186 B.Ed. student teachers across three colleges affiliated to Rajasthan universities — University of Rajasthan (Jaipur), Jai Narain Vyas University (Jodhpur), and Maharishi Dayanand Saraswati University (Ajmer) — during their 20-week school-based teaching practice internship in the academic year 2024–25. The Professional Identity Scale for Student Teachers (PISST), a 40-item validated instrument covering four dimensions (teacher efficacy — 10 items; professional commitment — 10 items; adaptive teaching belief — 10 items; reflective practice — 10 items, each scored out of 100), was administered at three time points: start of internship (Week 1), midpoint (Week 10), and end (Week 20).

Instrument and Analysis

The PISST was developed through expert review and piloted with 60 B.Ed. students prior to the main study, achieving Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.86$ for the total scale (subscale alphas 0.76–0.83). Repeated-measures analysis of variance was used to test for significant change across the three measurement points for each identity dimension, with post-hoc pairwise comparisons examining whether both the first-half (Weeks 1–10) and second-half (Weeks 10–20) gains were statistically significant for each dimension (5, 8).

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Table 1: Sample Characteristics

Variable	Value
Total n	186
Female (%)	71.5
Mean age (years)	23.4 ± 2.8
Teaching subject: Science (%)	28.5
Teaching subject: Social Studies (%)	26.3
Teaching subject: Languages (%)	24.7
Teaching subject: Mathematics (%)	20.5
Urban school placement (%)	54.3
Government school placement (%)	62.4

RESULTS AND FINDINGS

Figure 1 presents the four professional identity dimension trajectories across the three measurement points. All four dimensions showed significant progressive development: Teacher Efficacy (52.4 → 64.8 → 76.2, $F = 284.6$, $p < 0.001$); Professional Commitment (48.6 → 62.4 → 74.8, $F = 312.4$, $p < 0.001$); Adaptive Teaching Belief (44.2 → 58.6 → 72.4, $F = 298.8$, $p < 0.001$); Reflective Practice (38.8 → 56.2 → 69.6, $F = 376.2$, $p < 0.001$). Reflective practice showed both the lowest starting score (38.8) and the largest overall gain (+30.8 pp), while teacher efficacy showed the most rapid early-phase development (Week 1–10 gain: +12.4 pp versus +11.4 in Weeks 10–20).

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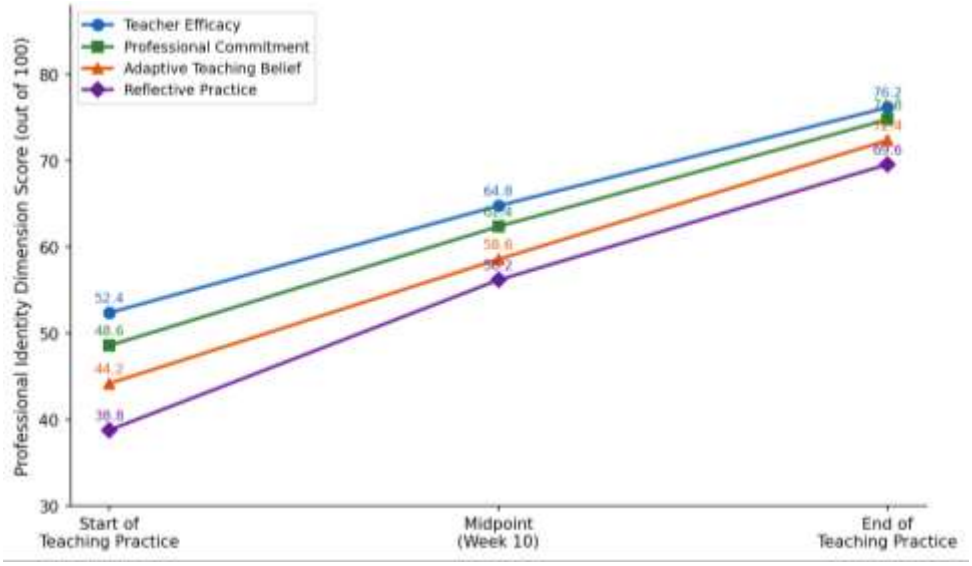


Figure 1: Professional identity dimension scores across three stages of teaching practice internship — B.Ed. students, Rajasthan (n = 186)

Table 2: Professional Identity Dimension Scores and Gains Across Three Measurement Points

Dimension	Start (W1)	Midpoint (W10)	End (W20)	Total Gain	W1–W10 Gain	W10–W20 Gain
Teacher Efficacy	52.4	64.8	76.2	+23.8	+12.4	+11.4
Professional Commitment	48.6	62.4	74.8	+26.2	+13.8	+12.4
Adaptive Teaching Belief	44.2	58.6	72.4	+28.2	+14.4	+13.8
Reflective Practice	38.8	56.2	69.6	+30.8	+17.4	+13.4

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Table 3: Student Teacher Self-Report of Key Internship Learning Experiences (% Citing)

Learning Experience	% Citing as "Most Significant" to Professional Identity Development
First experience of independently managing a full lesson	84.9
Handling unexpected student responses or classroom incidents	76.9
Receiving substantive feedback from supervising teacher	72.0
Observing experienced teachers' classroom management	68.3
Writing reflective journal after difficult lessons	62.9
Planning lessons knowing real students would experience them	58.1

DISCUSSION

The progressive and significant development of all four professional identity dimensions across the 20-week internship confirms teaching practice as a powerful professional identity formation process, consistent with Beauchamp and Thomas's (2009) framework positioning the practicum as the primary identity-formation site in initial teacher education (8). The finding that reflective practice shows the lowest starting score (38.8) yet the largest total gain (+30.8 pp) is theoretically significant: it suggests that prospective teachers enter teaching practice with limited prior experience of the kind of sustained, analytical professional reflection that Schön (1983) identifies as the epistemological basis of expert practice (4), but develop this capacity substantially through the iterative teaching-feedback-reflection cycle that a well-structured 20-week internship provides.

Teacher efficacy's more rapid early-phase growth (first 10 weeks) relative to its second-phase

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growth may reflect Bandura's (1997) model of mastery experience as the primary efficacy source: the first successful management of a lesson independently, cited by 84.9% of student teachers as among the most significant internship experiences, generates a dramatic efficacy-building mastery experience concentrated in the early internship phase when the first experiences of independent teaching responsibility occur. Subsequent efficacy development in the second half may be more incremental, reflecting continued competency refinement rather than the qualitative threshold crossing of first independent lesson management (9).

CONCLUSION

Teaching practice is theoretically grounded as an experiential professional learning process through frameworks including Schön's reflective practice, Kolb's ELT cycle, and Cochran-Smith and Lytle's inquiry stance, and operationally significant as the primary site of professional identity formation in B.Ed. programmes. Longitudinal data from Rajasthan B.Ed. colleges confirms substantial and progressive development of all four professional identity dimensions over a 20-week internship, with reflective practice showing the largest total gain and greatest need for deliberate supervisory cultivation at the internship's start. These findings reinforce the NCTE's extended internship mandate and highlight reflective practice development as the highest-priority supervisory focus throughout.

LIMITATIONS

- Single-administration repeated-measure design; maturation and testing effects cannot be fully excluded as alternative explanations for score growth.
- Three-college sample in Rajasthan limits generalisability to other state B.Ed. systems with different placement contexts and supervision models.
- The PISST is a self-report instrument; professional identity dimensions that are less conscious or accessible to self-report may be underrepresented.
- The study tracks development within the internship period but not beyond it; professional identity trajectories in the first year of in-service teaching were not assessed.

FUTURE SCOPE

- Longitudinal follow-up study tracking professional identity dimensions into the first two years of classroom teaching to assess post-internship development trajectories.

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- Comparative study examining professional identity development under block placement versus integrated internship structural models.
- Qualitative study examining the specific internship events and mentoring interactions that student teachers associate with the most significant identity development moments.
- Multi-state comparative study examining professional identity development patterns across Rajasthan, Maharashtra, and Tamil Nadu B.Ed. contexts.

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