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The role of practicum in teacher education policy documents in Ethiopia, Myanmar, Kazakhstan, and Iran

Ei Phyu Chaw[1], Aigerim Kozhabergenova[2], Mestawot Tafese Beyene[3], Amin Saed[4], Erika Kopp[5], Nora Rapos[6]

Abstract

This study aims to compare the role of practicum in teacher education policy documents in Ethiopia, Myanmar, Kazakhstan, and Iran to propose a better way to improve the practicum system The term practicum in pre-service teacher education allows student teachers to integrate their knowledge from the university courses and experiences from the practicing school (Kopp & Kálmán, 2015). The increasing importance of practice in teacher education is a global educational policy trend, but the national context necessarily influences implementation. However, few studies researched comparing teacher education in developing countries, although the national context is essential to understand the organization and operation of teacher education systems (Tatto, 2021) where the main obstacle is the linguistic diversity of different countries. This study referred to Weidman et al. (2014) conceptual framework for comparative and international teacher education. The qualitative document analysis method with MAXQDA software is used to analyze teacher education policy documents, mainly focusing on the aim, structure, and student activities. Researchers developed a common codebook, imported it into the software, and analyzed 39 documents. The results revealed that the aim and definition of the practicum are similar, but the learning outcomes of student teachers' practice related to practicum are a little different between the four countries. Student teachers are required to complete the practicum as part of their pre-service teacher education program in four countries. Teacher education policy documents in four countries have addressed all the elements and requirements related to teacher education contexts, however, the implementation level of the practicum in each country may differ significantly. Nevertheless, this study compares the practicum in teacher education document, highlights similarities and differences, and shares the best practices from four countries.

Keywords: practicum; teacher education; policy document; document analysis.

[1] Ph.D candidate, Eotvos Lorand University, Institute of Education, chaw.ei.phyu@ppk.elte.hu
[2] Ph.D candidate, Eotvos Lorand University, Institute of Education, aigerim@student.elte.hu
[3] Ph.D student, Eotvos Lorand University, Institute of Education, mestawot.beyene@ppk.elte.hu
[4] Ph.D candidate, Eotvos Lorand University, Institute of Education, amin.saed@ppk.elte.hu
[5] Associate Professor, Eotvos Lorand University, Institute of Education, kopp.erika@ppk.elte.hu
[6] Associate Professor, Eotvos Lorand University, Institute of Education, rapos.nora@ppk.elte.hu

1. Introduction

The growing importance of practicum is common and central to teacher education programs worldwide (Cohen et al., 2013). Investigating practicum is crucial for teacher education programs; theoretical and practical understanding of practicum significantly enhances teacher educators and the student teachers' pedagogical, expedient, professional, and teaching skills (Tatto, 2021). International comparative studies on practice are becoming increasingly important, but researchers' linguistic and cultural background means that much of this research is focused on the English language area (Kopp & Pesti, 2022). Consequently, many countries whose teacher training documents are not or only partially available in English are less included in international comparisons. Countries where fewer comparative studies are available tend to have fewer resources and less developed teacher education systems. However, important lessons can be drawn from the solutions and that countries with less favourable conditions have adopted to improve their teacher education programs. Our research team's linguistic and cultural diversity allows us to break down the cultural and linguistic barriers to research. The research started with analyzing the national documents on teacher education, focusing on those parts of the documents that relate to practice. The article summarises the main results of this analysis.

2. Theoretical background

There are many calls for more international research in teacher education (Darling-Hammond, 2017). Coccia and Benati (2018) presented that the comparative studies in social sciences examine the elements, structures, systems, processes, and policies in national, international and local contexts and demonstrate similar nature and contrast. The characteristics of teacher education are influenced by multiplex organizational factors of the respective national context and emphasize on isolated educational requirement (Kopp & Pesti, 2022). To understand the factors influencing the context of education, the conceptual part of the teacher education program must incorporate practicum in the preparation of student teachers (Tuli & File, 2010).

Weidman et al. (2014) drew a conceptual framework based on probable inter-relationships among the critical components of the national context that combine in different ways to establish the country's teacher education system. Even though teacher education in each country is traditionally and locally shaped to a large extent, it is also essential to internationalize it (Leutwyler et al., 2017). Much global research on teacher education includes some ideas of education reform and transformation (Avalos, 2011; Adamson, 2012; Kopp, 2020). Practicum and internship experiences are required in various teacher preparation programs (Boylan & Scott, 2009).

Much research focuses on the strategies and consequences of implementing the practicum based on teacher training programs (Chaw & Kopp, 2019). Naderi (2022) investigated the internship program in teacher training through a comparative study of

England and Iran and found the importance of internship programs for student teachers in both countries. Moreover, Clarke & Mena (2020) conducted a comparative study on practicum mentoring in New Zealand, Thailand, China, Canada, Spain, and Australia. They highlighted that practicum mentors give student teachers a unique way of thinking about teacher education.

Despite all these studies mentioned above on the importance of practicum in developing the teaching profession, the comparative studies of the role of practicum in teacher training in developing countries can be considered one of the neglected areas of educational research. Besides, getting the documents in developing countries is a big challenge because of accessibility and national language issues. Although we are former teacher educators from teacher education universities in four countries, permission is required from the respective person to access the related teacher education policy documents in each teacher education program.

In order to fill the literature gap, the present comparative study highlights the role of practicum in teacher education policy documents in Ethiopia, Myanmar, Kazakhstan, and Iran to better understand how the practicum is implemented in different contexts. The purpose of this study is to compare the role of practicum in teacher education documents from four developing countries by comparing the aim, structure, and student activities during the practicum. The programs were selected based on the availability of documents in languages we are familiar with and countries with developing teacher education programmes. Thus, this study aimed to answer the following questions: (1) What is the role of practicum in teacher education documents in Ethiopia, Myanmar, Kazakhstan, and Iran? (2) What are the similarities and differences between practicum programs in those countries?

National context of four countries

The country context of Ethiopia, Myanmar, Kazakhstan, and Iran are briefly described in the following section to understand the national context before comparing the role and structure of the practicum in teacher education policy documents in these countries.

Ethiopia

Ethiopia, located in the Horn of Africa, is a multilinguistic and multinational country with a population of 117 million and 2.5 % of population growth rate per year (World Bank, 2021). The main religions are Ethiopian Orthodox Christianity and the official language is Amharic. It has over 90 distinct ethnic groups, and 80 languages are spoken (Minority Rights Group, 2015). In Ethiopia, there needs to be a clear and comprehensive teacher education policy; the system suffers from unnecessary interference from the Ministry of Education and Regional Education Bureaus. The teaching profession is perceived as having lower value and poor working conditions. Low income and a heavy workload impede teaching attractiveness (Assefa, 2008). Moreover, teacher education faces several challenges, including the linkage between the curriculum in training institutions and schools, teachers' insufficient subject mastery, unattractive profession for trainees, and

ineffective program management. In 2021, a new teacher education curriculum was also created. Even with the new curriculum, the teaching profession will accept candidates with a 2.00 GPA for a diploma certificate and 2.25 for a bachelor's degree (Ministry of Education, 2021).

Myanmar

Myanmar (formerly Burma) is a Southeast Asian nation in the Asia continent. The bordering countries of Myanmar includes India, Bangladesh, China, Laos, and Thailand. The population of Myanmar is 54 million, and the annual population growth is 0.7%. The country has more than 100 ethnic groups (World Bank, 2021). The presence of the British colonists (1824 to 1948) inevitably transformed the nation, its government, society, education system, and institutions. In Myanmar, teaching is considered a service profession in which teachers serve society and serve as role models for the communities they serve. Centralized system is operationalized in higher education and and famous universities had limited autonomy as one part of educational reform (Kandiko Howson & Lall, 2020). The teacher demand will also increase across the system as the new curriculum is introduced and school years are expanded (Lall, 2020). In Myanmar, the Ministry of Education sets the curriculum and the assessment of Teacher Education. Education Degree Colleges offer a 4-year degree program, and two significant universities of education provide a 5-year degree program as the pre-service teacher education program (Chaw & Kopp, 2019). Teacher education program in education degree colleges faces challenges of teaching new curriculum, the practicum, technology, and continuous professional development of teachers, and the dilemma of the new degree structure (Lall, 2020).

Kazakhstan

Kazakhstan is a country in Central Asia with a population of 19 million (World Bank, 2021). Kazakhstan is a secular, multiethnic country; the domestic policy of the state is aimed at the development of one society, one land, and one state for different ethnic groups that live in the country (Sheryazdanova, 2018). Most of the population are Kazakhs (69.03%), followed by Russians (18.47%) (Bureau of National Statistics, 2021). The Kazakhstani education system was inherited from the Soviet system based on teacher-centred approach (Abylkassymova, 2020). Current trends in the Kazakhstani education system are focused on preparing competitive specialists with not only traditional "hard skills" but also "soft skills". In connection with this, the professional practicum of students is considered a compulsory component of all training programs, and the implementation of which is not only difficult but often impossible in the conditions of academic training (Gabdrakhmanova et al., 2020). Today, teachers in Kazakhstan are prepared in the two-level education system that includes pre-service education consisting of secondary vocational education and training (SVET) and training in higher education institutions and in-service training in centres of professional development (Tastanbekova, 2018). After graduating from the pre-service teacher

education organizations (college or university), teachers obtain a diploma proving their pedagogical qualification (Tastanbekova, 2018). In-service training centres provide training courses and educational services in advanced training and professional development for teaching the staff (Kozhabergenova & Kopp, 2021).

Iran

Iran is the second-largest country in the middle east with 85.028.760 people (World Bank, 2021). The main religion in Iran is Islam (99 %). Persians are the largest ethnic group in Iran with 61 % of the total population (Minority Rights Group, 2015). Several reforms have been made and implemented in the secondary and primary education sectors in Iran's education system since the 1979 Islamic Revolution to certify quality education. Moghaddas and Zakeri (2012) asserted that despite various teacher training institutions and new educational policies, high-quality teacher education has not been achieved. According to Moghaddas and Zakeri (2012), the authorities make educational decisions, and a one-size-fits-all policy is dominant without recognizing individual differences. Similarly, Momen (2020) states that teachers in Iran should model morality, spirituality, and science. In addition, teachers should ensure that learners are invariably guided toward learning sources and that their overall development is supported. Teachers are responsible for organizing and monitoring learning activities, arranging and managing the classroom, and motivating students to learn. In the field of teacher education in Iran, student teachers in the undergraduate program are required to complete practicum courses during their undergraduate years. Students are assigned to teams in schools, with their partners acting as critical friends. Cooperating teachers allow students to observe and provide feedback on their peers' teaching.

3. Methodology

Research design

This paper uses the qualitative research design and document analysis method to analyze the aspects of the practicum's role in the teacher education policy documents in four countries. Then, based on the aim of our study, we collected and analyzed 39 practicum-related papers in teacher education policy documents using a deductive approach.

Type of data

This study identifies secondary data documents (teacher education policy documents related to practicum issues) in four countries (Iran, Myanmar, Ethiopia, and Kazakhstan) as the data to be analyzed. There are 27 documents from the teacher education policy documents in Myanmar, five from Kazakhstan, two from Iran and five from Ethiopia. In Myanmar, some policy documents could only access the hard copy version, and the researcher asked the responsible person to take a photo of the hard copy file. Thus, 23

photos are included in the Myanmar case. Table 1 showed the type of documents for this study.

Table 1: Type of documents in four countries

Name of the country	Name of the documents in MAXQDA	Type of documents		Total
		Scanned Photos	Document file	
Ethiopia	E1, E2, E3, E4, E5	-	5	5
Myanmar	M1, M2, M3, M27	23	4	27
Kazakhstan	K1, K2, K3, K4, K5	-	5	5
Iran	I1, I2	-	2	2
Total		23	16	39

Data analysis method

The document analysis method is conducted using MAXQDA software. The qualitative deductive coding method is used in this current study. The qualitative deductive coding approach has been labelled "template coding" (King, 1998), and Blair (2015), "deductive coding" (Miles et al., 2014), "protocol coding", or "a priori coding" (Saldaña, 2021). In deductive/template coding, the researcher must define the codes drawn from the theory, research questions, and literature (King, 1998). Blair (2015) described three phases of template coding; creating the priori codes starts with (1) the research problems, (2) the research questions and aim (3) the literature.

Data analysis process

1) Creating a common codebook/ template

This study refers to the deductive coding approach of Blair (2015) and Miles et al. (2014) and is based on three phases of data in the deductive approach. First, we focused on research problems and developed "priori codes." Second, we looked back through the research questions and aim, adjusted the priori codes, and drew out the possible codes. In the next stage, we read the literature related to practicum in teacher education documents of our countries and revised the codes with the previous ones to create the final codes. Miles et al. (2014) suggested that codes should relate to one another in coherence, and sub-coding can be employed after an initial coding scheme has been applied. Then, we discussed the definition of the codes and subcodes and created a common code book or template for the analysis. We agreed to add additional codes if we found a unique case in each policy document. Our common codebook is presented in table 2.

Table 2: Common code for analysis of practicum in teacher education policy documents

Code	Subcodes	Definition/Meaning
Aim	Practicum definition	Definition of practicum
	Practicum aim	Aims of the practicum as a whole
	Learning outcomes	Skills, knowledge, and competencies that student-teachers are aimed to achieve them
Structure of the practicum	Type of practicum program	(E.g., Practicum in Undergraduate program, master program, internship program, university program or college program or internship)
	Credits number	Credit numbers for practicum period or practicum course or program
	Duration (Year/Semester)	The time period for the practicum/teaching practice in schools
	Practicum bases	Where students have their practice (e.g., at university, school, educational organization)
	University arrangement	E.g., the formal arrangement including the number of student teachers in each school, allocation of subjects, an official letter from the university to the school.
Student teachers' activities during the practicum	Type of practice	E.g., educational, professional, pre-diploma practice, bloc teaching, practice teaching
	practice activities	Student teacher's activities during practicum (e.g., teaching, observation, participation in school activities, writing the report, assessing student learning outcomes, etc.)
	Lesson study	Lesson preparation by self or together with other student teachers, teaching aids

As described in table 2, we developed our common codebook, including 3 main codes, 11 subcodes, and respective definitions of each code related to practicum in teacher education policy documents in four countries.

2) Importing and creating code system into MAXQDA software

Team coding assists with definitional clarity and makes a good reliability check (Miles et al., 2014). Before conducting the analysis, the researchers input the codebook (common codes) into the MAXQDA software. After that, that MAXQDA software file (with imported codes) is exported to other research group members for analysis. Then, the other researchers downloaded the file and imported the codesystem into the software.

3) Analyzing the documents/ Coding in MAXQDA

After importing teacher education policy documents and codebooks, the researchers started analyzing the document/ coding process. Analyzing the template coding approach requires us to search for the things that might be in the codebook and decide whether to skip the data or implant it into a code that does not fit when the concept in the documents does not match the definitions of the codes (Blair, 2015). The researchers read the concepts from the documents, interpreted them, and matched them with the codes from the codebook. Afterwards, each researcher sent their MAXQDA coded file to one researcher from the group. Finally, the researchers merged the coded files of teacher policy documents of four countries in MAXQDA.

4. Results

There are 39 teacher education policy documents, including photos and files, and the group of researchers analyzed these documents and did 224 codes. After merging our team-coded files, the researchers found that some documents have many codes and some documents that do not have many codes. The following crosstab table compares document and code variables in four countries' teacher education policy documents.

Table 3: Summary of comparing codes in teacher education policy documents in four countries (total doc-39, codes-224)

Code system	Myanmar (M1, ..., M27)	Kazakhstan (K1, ..., K5)	Iran (I1, I2)	Ethiopia (E1, ..., E5)	Total codes
Aim					
Practicum definition	3	4	2	2	11
Practicum aim	6	8	6	4	24
learning outcomes	9	6	2	3	20
Structure of the practicum					
Credits number	0	6	6	4	16
Duration (Year/Semester)	9	8	11	2	30
Practicum bases	7	10	2	0	19
University arrangement	13	4	0	0	17
*Practicum model	1	0	0	0	1
Type of practicum program	5	5	2	2	14
Student teachers' activities during the practicum					
Type of practice	12	11	2	9	34
practice activities	12	7	8	5	32
lesson study	3	0	3	0	6
Total					224

*(0 = no description about the codes)

The summary of codes in teacher education policy documents in four countries is shown in table 3. According to the researchers' pre-defined codebook, there are three main codes related to practicum: aim, the structure of the practicum, and student-teachers' activities during practicum. Under these main codes, there are 13 sub-codes: three codes under aim, six codes under the structure of the practicum and three codes under student-teachers' activities during the practicum. However, there is one new subcode named "practicum model" under the structure of the practicum in Myanmar.

In comparing practicum in teacher education policy documents in four countries with the pre-defined codebook using the qualitative deductive approach, the researchers found distinctive features in each country.

Table 4. Comparing the similarities and differences of variables (distinctive codes) in four countries

Country name	Similarities and differences in distinctive codes				
	Aim/ definition	*Credit number*	*University arrangement*	*Lesson study*	*Practicum model*
Myanmar	√	χ	√	√	√
Iran	√	√	χ	√	χ
Ethiopia	√	√	χ	χ	χ
Kazakhstan	√	√	√	χ	χ

(√ means similar cases, and χ denotes different cases)

The comparison of distinctive codes between the four countries' policy documents is tabulated in table 4. In four countries, similar cases and different situations related to distinctive features of the practicum (such as credit number, university arrangement, lesson study, and practice activities). For example, the credit numbers for the practicum period or practicum course or program are not explicitly described in Myanmar's teacher education policy document. However, it is mentioned in Iran, Ethiopia, and Kazakhstan. Moreover, the word "model" in that document means the type of practicum provided to student teachers in Myanmar. In other countries' documents, different terms such as "type", "structure", and "program" of the practicum are found instead of the word "model".

Besides, the university arrangement (formal arrangement including the number of student teachers in each school, allocation of subjects, and approval from the university to the school) is not clearly outlined in Iran's teacher education policy document. In Ethiopia's teacher education policy document, some distinctive codes of "university arrangement" and "lesson study" are not indicated. In Kazakhstan, teacher education policy documents did not state "lesson study" and "portfolio" even though the other three countries had included them in their documents.

5. Discussions

In comparing the role of practicum in teacher education policy documents in Ethiopia, Myanmar, Kazakhstan, and Iran, the authors focused on three main practicum domains – aims, practicum structure, and students' activities.

In answering research question 1, we explained the three common codes (aim/definition, the structure of the practicum, and student teachers' activities during the practicum) mentioned in tables 2 and 3 in developing four countries.

(1) Aim/Definition

We found that the practicum aim is similar in the four countries in which this term is defined as an opportunity for student teachers to put in the theoretical knowledge and skills they obtained during their study in the actual situation of teaching lessons. In general, practicum in all four countries requires their student teachers to combine theoretical knowledge and practice, develop professional knowledge and practices, understand the school environment and the contexts related to teacher education,

identify practicum-related issues and reflect on their practice. Since the practicum aim is somehow reflected in the practicum definition, aims in the teacher education policy documents of the four countries are analogous. However, there are some differences in the learning outcomes of the students' practice during the practicum.

When we go deeper into the policy documents,

a) In Myanmar, student teachers are expected to become aware of the school environment and teachers' professional responsibilities, combine theory and practice and acquire teacher competencies standards in the practicum guidebook of Myanmar teacher education.

b) In Ethiopia, student teachers are expected to investigate and reflect on the organization and management of local schools, understand environmental factors underpinning education, and have actual experience related to the school environment and students, and identify issues and solutions relating to the practicum.

c) In Iran, students are prospected to get the ability to reflect on practice through participation in the teaching process and perform learning activities at the classroom level.

d) In Kazakhstan, practicum intends for student teachers to consolidate the knowledge from training, acquire practical skills, and master best practices to develop professional activities and future skills.

(2) Structure of the practicum (Duration of practicum and Credit number)

In general, the four countries described the credit system of practicum in their teacher education program. However, different types of practicum programs (campus courses and school placement) and credit systems based on the hour/courses and terms (practicum, internship, professional practice) are found in four countries.

a) In Myanmar, student teachers in the undergraduate program participate in practicum I in 3rd year (in the 6th semester) and Practicum II in the 4th year (in the 8th semester) at the University of Education. The practicum module in Education College is scheduled from 1st to 4th year (11 weeks of lesson study and 17 weeks in practice school). Nevertheless, the credit hours for the practicum are not mentioned explicitly.

b) In Ethiopia, the practicum is included in a diploma program for pre-primary education: Practicum I (school observation) for three credits hour and Practicum II (assisted teaching) for three credits hour; Bachelor of Education for primary and middle education: Practicum I for three credit hour and Practicum II for three credit hours; and post-graduate diploma program for secondary school teachers: Practicum took one month for 4 credit hours.

c) Kazakhstan: Pedagogical practice is carried out in the 3rd year (in 6th semester), at least four credits (at least four weeks, 120 hours), and industrial pedagogical practice is carried out in the 4th year (8th semester), at least ten credits (at least ten weeks, 240 hours).

d) Iran: the internship course is planned to offer 128 hours for two credit numbers, and school placement takes six weeks.

(3) Student teachers' activities

During the practicum period, four countries have assigned different activities for student teachers to be fulfilled. However, all four countries include written reports about their professional experience and practice.

a) In Myanmar, student activities during practicum include assessing their learning, writing practicum journals, lesson study, observation, assistant teaching experience, and student case study.

b) The student teachers in Kazakhstan need to submit a written report on the implementation of the professional practice program and a diary report on the completion of professional practice.

c) In Ethiopia, student teachers' activities include sharing experiences, teaching practice in the school, micro-teaching, reflection on school placements, school observations-lesson observations, lesson planning, and portfolios.

d) Iranian student teachers must learn campus courses, including reflective observation, narrative writing, and analysis of experiences as constructive/shaping elements of intellectual practice, participating in workshops, and as a practice activity; they teach at the classroom level as a micro-scale.

Research question 2 explored the comparative similarities and differences between the countries. Although each country conceptualizes the aim and definition of practicum, the meaning and purpose of practicum placement are nearly the same in the four countries. However, there are differences in calculating credit system, arrangement of practicum and student teachers' activities in four countries. The credit number in the Myanmar document is not clearly explained. Practicum in Myanmar is attached to the teacher education curriculum contents, and it is not separated as another module or course within the university program. In other countries, especially Iran and Ethiopia, the practicum is a module or a compulsory course that student teachers must fulfil in their teacher education program.

The university proposed the practicum arrangement and continued with the hierarchical process in the document of Myanmar and Kazakhstan. The detailed arrangement and process are not mentioned in Iran and Ethiopia documents. Our codes defined lesson study as one of the student teachers' activities during the practicum. However, lesson study is mentioned in the Myanmar document as the activities aligned

with the practicum process. The conversation about student teachers' practice and lesson observation with the supervisor of the practicum program are described in the document of Iran. However, the lesson study is not mentioned in the documents of Ethiopia and Kazakhstan.

6. Conclusions

This study explores how practitioners in different countries respond to the practicum and how developing countries implement their practicums. According to each country's documents, students are required to complete the practicum as part of their pre-service teacher education program. Furthermore, the practicum structure resembles a centralized protocol system; for instance, in Kazakhstan, the rector places students in educational settings based on the terms of practice and the teacher who leads them. The Ministry of Education approves student teacher's practicum arrangements in Myanmar. From the perspective of internationalization, we can learn the best practices of practicum from each other's teacher education documents, such as the component of practicum structure in a university program (e.g., credit system, module arrangement, time period) and different student teachers' performance including lesson observations and professional feedback and conversation with the practicum supervisor and portfolio.

Even though teacher education policy documents in four countries have addressed all the elements and requirements related to teacher education contexts, the implementation level of the practicum in each country may differ significantly. Besides, creating a more comprehensive network of practice bases in different types of schools (e.g., gymnasiums, lyceums, specialized schools for talented children, and inclusive schools) is necessary. Nevertheless, this study provides insight into the role of practicum from teacher education policy documents of four different countries. In addition to identifying similarities and differences, the document shares best practices and suggests ways to improve each country's practicum.

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