

## Exploring Practicum Models in Maldivian Teacher Education: Structures, Challenges, And Future Directions

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**ABSTRACT:** Practicum is considered as the core component of any teacher education programs and recent research attests that the structure of the practicum has significant impact on the development of student teachers' (STs) professional competencies. There has been a large array of international literature on the types of practicum models that teacher education intuitions adopt, and the features of the practicum that governs those models and how it affects the professional growth of the STs. However, there was no formal research documented in the Maldivian context at the time of this PhD study. This paper is focused on one of the objectives of the thesis: investigate main features of the practicum offered in teacher education institutions in the Maldives. This empirical research employed mixed-methods triangulation design and utilized STs data, collected from 317 STs through a survey questionnaire (STQ) and semi-structured interviews. The findings show that different teacher education institutions have different practicum models, for example, most of the teacher education institutions adopt integrated model, while there are institutions that have one practicum round towards the end of the programs. These differences ultimately lead to have varied practicum structures which is attributed to the lack of national level practicum framework. Thus, it is recommended to the relevant authorities to develop practicum frameworks and standards to ensure that the uniformity and quality of student teachers who graduate from various teacher education institutions in the Maldives. Additionally, considering the existing literature and findings, this study recommends to revisit and revise existing practicum structures to provide multiple exposure and extended period of practicum for the STs to develop essential teaching skills, and to reduce everlasting theory-practice gap that exists in the field of teacher education.

**KEYWORDS:** Practicum, practicum models, practicum structures, student teachers

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### 1. INTRODUCTION

The practicum during pre-service teacher training serves as the most crucial component of any teacher education program (Al-Mekhlafi & Naji, 2013). The practicum is a complex phenomenon, which involves multiple stakeholders who need to work collaboratively to make the practicum successful. Due to the complex nature of the practicum and its importance in teacher education, there is a concerted effort across the world to improve the quality of teacher education programs, by including the practicum as an integral component of those programs (Cox, Deed, & Pridham, 2013). There have been growing concerns and debate in the international literature on what form the practicum should take or which model or structure best aids in developing the essential qualities of pre-service teachers, which is often regarded as the fundamental purpose of practicum. There are quite a number of different models or approaches to the teaching practicum. For example, the critical intervention model, practicum initiative model, master teacher model, joint problem solving model, to name a few, have been used in teacher education programs across the globe (Beckford & Roland, 2010; Ben-Peretz, 2000). The type of model governed the structure of the practicum. For example, in the integrated model, many practicum rounds are scheduled throughout the teacher education program, and in some countries it is conducted simultaneously with on-campus theory classes. While in the apprenticeship model the practicum is typically conducted towards the end of the teacher education program when university classes have concluded.

The term 'structure of the practicum' here is referred to as how various elements of the practicum such as length, timing, observations, supervision and assessment are organized. The review of recent literature on practicum structures demonstrates that the models and the structure of the practicum vary across the countries (Endeley, 2014; Manzar-Abbas & Lu, 2013; Min, Abdulla, Mansor & Shamsudin, 2014). Most countries have multi-year program formats (e.g., a 4-year Bachelor of Education degree). Some countries also have a one-year after degree program formats (that result in a Bachelor of Education degree). In some cases, it was identified that there were differences in practicum structures among the universities within the same country. For example, from a comparative study of practicum structures in ten different countries (USA, Canada, UK, Singapore, Brunei, Hong Kong, South Africa, Australia, India and China) Manzar-Abbas and Lu concluded that most of the countries adopt integrated or partially integrated model, but the degree of integration varies significantly among the universities. The University of Glasgow in UK adopts a more

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integrated model of practicum where a four-year teacher education program comprises a total of seven practicum rounds scheduled across most semesters except the first semester of the final year. However, another university in UK, the University of Edinburgh, offers four practicum rounds in each year of a four-year teacher education program, where the STs are exposed to all the stages of schooling (Nursery, early stage, middle and upper stages of schooling) except the final practicum round where freedom is given to the STs to choose the stages of schooling (Endeley, 2014). The duration of these practicum rounds varies from five-week to 11 weeks.

Similarly, it was evident from the literature that universities that have the same number of practicum rounds have differences in how they schedule these practicums (Manzar-Abbas & Lu, 2013; Min, Abdulla, Mansor & Shamsudin, 2014). For example, the University of Queensland and University of Canberra in Australia have four practicum rounds for a four-year degree course but the latter commences their practicum from the second year of the program. Two universities studied from the USA showed that one has three practicum rounds starting from the second year of the program, while the other has two rounds, one at the beginning of the program and one in the last year of the program. The countries that report having four practicum rounds integrated throughout the teacher education program include UK, Australia, India, Singapore, Malta and England (El-Kerdany, 2012; Karammustafaoglu, 2009; Manzar-Abbas & Lu, 2013; Min, Abdulla, Mansor & Shamsudin, 2014). Among these countries, Singapore and Australia start the practicum from the second year of the program, whereas the other countries have practicum starting from the first year. In addition, countries like USA, Canada, Brunei, Hong Kong, Finland and South Africa have three practicum rounds that start from the second year of the program, while China, Malaysia and Pakistan have one practicum round scheduled at the final year of the program (El-Kerdany, 2012; Gujjar, Ramzan & Bajwa, 2011; Manzar-Abbas & Lu, 2013; Min, Abdulla, Mansor & Shamsudin, 2014; Mitchell, Clarke & Nuttall, 2007).

From the review of extant literature, it is evident that only Cameroon has two practicum rounds that start from the second year of the program (Endley, 2014). In addition, this review of literature related to the practicum model revealed that Malaysia has the longest practicum (16 weeks) while Pakistan has the shortest practicum (four to eight weeks) compared to the practicum structure (Gujjar, Naoreen & Bajwa, 2010). In contrast, the practicum model in Germany is quite different compared to the models in other countries noted in the preceding discussion. Most of the teacher education programs in Germany adopts an apprenticeship model where the theory is taught at the first year and the STs are placed in schools as wage employees for the remaining two years (El-Kerdany, 2012). During these two years STs spend one third of their time attending theory classes.

According to Ure (2009), the type of model and the structure of the practicum adopted by the TEIs have significant impact on the quality of learning that STs undergo during the practicum. He further argued that the models that provide multiple exposure to school experience alongside with the theory classes, as in the integrated model, enhances the potential of the STs to integrate their learning from both experiences. Additionally, he also claimed that the models that provide prior observation and the one which is designed to have observation and block teaching alternatively in a diverse setting enable the STs to have better understanding about theoretical and practical aspects of their teaching, and the STs were better able to deal with the broader professional demands of teaching compared to the STs who have undertaken teaching separated from theory sessions. Therefore, according to Ure, the integrated model is the preferred model.

Similarly, several other authors also argued that the duration and the timing of practicum have a significant impact of STs learning during the practicum (Endeley, 2014; Gujjar, Ramzan & Bajwa, 2011; Karammustafaoglu, 2009; Manzar-Abbas & Lu, 2013; Min, Abdulla, Mansor & Shamsudin, 2014; Ure, 2009; Wyss, Siebert, & Dowling, 2012). These authors argued that an integrated model with an extended duration of time is essential for the STs as teaching is highly skill oriented and a practical profession that requires a great deal of practice. It was pointed out that a longer practicum enables STs to develop stronger relationships with their pupils and other stakeholders, and appreciate more fully their personal professional growth as teachers. Additionally, it provides more opportunities to STs to integrate and experiment with many theories that they have learnt (Wyss, Siebert, & Dowling, 2012). Further, having an extended practicum provides extensive exposure to the experienced expert teachers in the field, thus enabling STs to refine their teaching skills even more (Zeichner, 2006). However, some cautions about extended exposure to practice settings (leading to conformity rather than creativity) has also been recorded (Mickelson, 1990).

As has been illuminated earlier, the timing of the practicum can have a significant impact on achieving the intended outcome of the teacher education program. For example, Manzar-Abbas and Lu (2013) recommended that it is best to schedule the first practicum round during the first year of the program. The implication of having practicum at the beginning of the program is that it assists STs to attest their career choices which is one of the purposes of the practicum noted in the preceding section. In addition, Manzar-Abbas and Lu (2013) also highlighted that provision of multiple exposure (early, middle, and late) to various contexts is highly imperative for the STs to understand the diversity of learning needs of pupils from variety to socio-economic backgrounds. It also helps STs to better prepare for the next practicum round by reflecting upon and refining early practicum experiences. Consistent with this position, the literature demonstrates that scheduling practicum at the end of the teacher education programs impedes STs' overall professional development by not allowing for early reflection on practice throughout one's program.

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The extant literature related on various models and the structure of the practicum indicates that most of the countries across the world adopt a version of the integrated model. Moreover, it indicates that there are variations in practicum structures among the countries that adopt similar or the same practicum models and it even differs among the universities within the same country. In addition, the recent literature demonstrates that the type of model and how the practicum is structured significantly impact STs' learning during the practicum. It is evident from the literature that multiple exposures in a variety of practicum settings possess several advantages over one single practicum placement. Correspondingly, a longer extended practicum experience also provides numerous benefits to STs compared with a shorter practicum placement (assuming that sufficient reflection in an on practice takes place).

Given the fact that the structure of the practicum plays a vital role in developing STs teaching competencies during the practicum and the lack of research in the Maldivian context in this regards, this study is designed to analyze the main features of the practicum in the teacher education programs offered in all the Teacher Education Institution.

## 2. METHOD

### Research Design

In one conceptualization of a mixed-method design, Lodico, Spaulding, and Voegtler (2006) divided mixed-method research into explanatory, exploratory, and triangulation design. Among these three, the study employed mixed-method triangulation design, in which both quantitative (survey) and qualitative (observations and semi-structured interviews) data were collected in relatively short order without a significant time lapse. Triangulation design enhances the credibility of the findings by comparing and corroborating the data obtained from all quantitative (survey) and qualitative (field observations and semi-structured interviews) methods.

### Setting and Participants

The study employed a multistage sampling technique in which the sample was obtained following three successive stages. The first stage involved selecting four geographical zones: Male' city, North Central, South Central and Southern. In the second stage, 21 placement schools were selected from the selected zones, which include 16 schools from Male' city, two schools from South Central (F. Atoll Education Centre and Gan, Hamad Bin Khaleefa Al Saanee school), two schools from Southern (Sn, Sharafudheen and Hithadho school) and one schools from North Central (R. Atoll Education Centre). In the third stage participants from each placement school were selected on voluntary basis. This resulted to obtain 317 Student Teachers (STs), 205 Cooperating Teachers (CTs), two Supervising Lecturers (SLs), ten School Based Coordinators (SBCs) and three Institutional Based Teachers (IBCs) who played the dual role of both IBCs and SLs.

### Instruments

The study was aimed at obtaining information from the entire population of the key actors of the practicum (STs and CTs). As such, a questionnaire-based survey was considered most suitable. Fraeklin and Wallen (2009) stated that the primary purpose of a survey is to elicit detailed information from an entire population as defined by the study. In addition, due to the multifaceted nature of the practicum and the time constraints, it allows the researcher to collect information from multiple sites within the allotted time frame. Thus, self-prepared survey questionnaires for STs (STQ) and CTs (CTQ) were developed and pilot tested before the actual data collection. Similarly, Interview protocol and observational protocols were developed and pilot tested.

### Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS software and the qualitative data were analyzed by employing the five stage qualitative data analysis framework described by Yin (2011). That is; compilation of data base, assembling, reassembling, interpreting and making conclusions from the data.

## 3. RESULTS

This article is based solely on the data collected from STs (STQ and semi-structured interviews) during time of data collection (2014-2015). For the purpose of this article only the data related to the key features of the practicum in various teacher education programs are reported in this section. The following Table 1.1 presents the key features of various teacher education programs in the Maldives.

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**Table 1.1 Key Features of the Practicum in Various Teacher Education Programs in the Maldives**

| Program Type                                 | Duration of the program in years | No of Supervision rounds | Duration of the practicum weeks | in Assessment | No of teaching session assessed |
|----------------------------------------------|----------------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------------|---------------|---------------------------------|
| <b>Early Childhood Education (ECE) Level</b> |                                  |                          |                                 |               |                                 |
| Degree                                       | 3                                | 3                        | 4                               | CT+SL         | CT+SL 3                         |
| Diploma                                      | 1, 2                             | 1,2                      | 4,8                             | CT+SL         | CT+SL/SL 2, 3, 4                |
| Advanced Certificate                         | 1, 7months                       | 1                        | 4                               | CT+SL         | SL 2                            |
| <b>Primary Level</b>                         |                                  |                          |                                 |               |                                 |
| Degree                                       | 3                                | 3                        | 4                               | CT+SL         | CT+SL 2                         |
| Diploma                                      | 1,2                              | 1,2                      | 4, 5,12                         | CT+SL         | CT+SL 2,3,4                     |
| Advanced Diploma                             | 2                                | 1,2                      | 4,5                             | CT+SL         | CT+SL 2,4                       |
| Advanced Certificate                         | 2                                | 2                        | 4                               | CT+SL         | CT+SL 1,4                       |
| <b>Secondary Level</b>                       |                                  |                          |                                 |               |                                 |
| Degree                                       | 3,4                              | 1,3                      | 4,5,12                          | CT+SL         | CT+SL 2                         |
| Diploma                                      | 2                                | 1,2                      | 4,5                             | CT+SL/CT      | CT+SL/CT 2,3                    |
| Advanced Diploma                             | 2                                | 2                        | 4                               | CT+SL         | CT+SL 2                         |

*Note:* CT = Cooperating Teacher and SL= Supervising Lecturer.

The analysis of STs data showed that STs who participated in this study were enrolled in three different levels of teacher education programs: ECE, primary and secondary. At each of these levels, degree, diploma courses were offered. It is evident from the data that the practicum structure varies in these different programs across the level and even within the same level. For example, in ECE level, there were a two-year diploma program and a one-year diploma program. The two-year diploma has two practicum rounds each consisting of a four-week block, totaling eight weeks of practicum for the whole program. Similarly, the one-year diploma program has one practicum round but based on STs' interview data, it was reported that the duration of this practicum varied: there were STs enrolled in a four-week practicum and an eight-week practicum. Correspondingly, there were differences in practicum structures within the secondary level programs. For example, there were STs enrolled in a 12-week block practicum and a five-week practicum while there were STs who undertook three practicum rounds each consisting of a four-week block. In addition, it is clear that the number of practicum varied across programs and the STs' experience of those programs. That is, there were three-year degree programs that had one practicum round while some STs reported that they had one practicum round in each academic year.

In terms of supervision and assessment, it is evident that in most of the programs, the practicum was supervised and assessed by the SLs and CTs. Only the diploma program at secondary level was supervised and assessed by CTs alone, while diploma and certificate programs in ECE level were assessed by only SLs. Also, the qualitative data revealed that some STs were assessed based on a marking system where a mark was awarded to each component of the practicum – two lessons assessed by CT and SL including the portfolio, resulting in a practicum report submitted to the Faculty/College. In order to receive a pass, STs had to achieve a minimum 50% from the aggregate of these two (e.g., they could receive 45% on one and 55% on the other to achieve a pass). While some STs reported that they were required to submit the practicum records, but it wasn't included in the assessment and they were assessed by only the SLs.

## 4. DISCUSSIONS

As indicated in the forgoing discussion, the key features of the practicum in various teacher education programs in the Maldives were derived from ST data. The STs data showed that there were three levels of teacher education programs, during the time of the data collection: ECE, primary and secondary. In each of these levels, different types of programs ranging from degree, diploma, advanced diploma and advanced certificate programs were offered. The latter is not offered for secondary school level teacher training programs.

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The structure of the practicum in degree programs at ECE and primary levels was the same. That is, three-year degree programs in ECE and primary have three practicum rounds, each consisting of four weeks and scheduled in the second semester of each academic year. In contrast, there were two variants of degree programs at the other levels: a three-year and a four-year program. Unlike ECE and primary level degree programs, these programs have different practicum structures. For example, there were STs enrolled in a 12-week, a five-week or a four-week practicum. This difference in practicum structures within the same type of program at the same level was further studied through face-to-face semi-structured interviews with STs.

Analysis of interview data showed that there were STs from three different teacher education institutions who had different practicum structures. For example, based on the qualitative data it was revealed that there were STs who had a four-week practicum round each academic year, while STs from the four-year degree program had a five-week practicum round scheduled at the last semester of the program. In addition, there were variations in the supervision and assessment of the practicum in these various programs. For example, in most of the programs, the supervision and assessment was carried out by the SLs and CTs. However, at the ECE level, the diploma and certificate level programs were supervised and assessed by only SLs, while the diploma program in secondary level was supervised and assessed by the CTs only.

Overall, the analysis indicated that there was no consistency in the practicum structures of the similar types of programs across various levels. Not only the structure, but the duration of the practicum in similar programs varied to some extent. From the empirical evidence of this study, together with the review of literature in the Maldivian context, it is clear that, at present, there is no regulatory body at a higher level to oversee the practicum conducted by various teacher education institutions in the country. These results also suggest that the graduates from these programs join the teaching force with a greater difference in their teaching skills. Even though they had completed the same program, they had different practicum structures, a core component of teacher education that, according to many authors, determines the quality of graduates. This is a significant finding for the relevant authorities when making decisions about establishing a regulatory body with governing policies on the organization and conduct of the practicum in various teacher education institutions in the Maldives. Establishing such a practicum governing body would ensure the quality and consistency in the practicum in programs across different levels. For example, formulating a national level framework on practicum would ultimately set a standard for the practicum conducted by various teacher education programs.

The relevant literature also attests that stable system level policies are important to implement an effective practicum. For example, top performing countries like Canada, Germany, Finland, Singapore, UK and China have policies on teacher education (El-Kerdany, 2012; Invarson, Reid, Buckley, Kleihenz, Masters & Rowley, 2014). Most of these countries have national level policies, or laws that translate a minimum number of practicum days required for teacher license or certification. One such example is the UK, where the length of the practicum is governed by law and regulation. In the case of the Maldives, as per the current status, there is no such a law or national level practicum framework that lays out the practicum requirements for the teacher certification. Neither a teacher registration body nor a teacher licensing body was established during the past 40 years of teacher education in the Maldives. Thus, there is no consistency in practicum structures implemented by various teacher education institutions, which ultimately would have a significant impact on the quality of the graduates. Apart from that, according to the current salary scale published by the Civil Service Commission of the Maldives, the salary of a teacher is based on the qualification (e.g., diploma, degree...). It doesn't account for the duration of the program or the nature of that experience. For example, there is no difference between a three-year degree, or a four-year degree, in terms of the salary. This could be a demotivating factor for the prospective STs to enroll in more demanding programs, even though these programs might be better in terms of the exposure to the content knowledge and the practicum experience.

In addition, it could be inferred from the analysis of various features of the practicum in different teacher education programs, that these programs had adopted an integrated model of teaching practicum. But the degree of integration varied within different types of teacher education programs. For example, there was a three-year degree program that had one practicum round per academic year without any on-campus theory classes during the practicum. But, there was another variant of the degree program that had a 12-week block practicum during the final year of the program concurrently with on-campus theory classes.

Countries like UK, India, Malta and England have adopted an integrated model where they have incorporated one practicum round in every academic year of the program. Having an integrated model such as this possesses several advantages (El-Kerdany, 2012; Karammustafaoglu, 2009; Manzar-Abbas & Lu, 2013; Min, Abdulla, Mansor, & Shamsudin, 2014). Ure (2009) pointed out that practicum models that provide multiple exposure to schools enables STs to integrate their learning from both practicum and university settings. These multiple exposures to multiple contexts facilitate the understanding of the broader professional demands of teaching. It also enables the STs to recognize the diversity of learning needs of pupils from different socio-economic backgrounds (Manzar-Abbas & Lu, 2013). In addition, it helps the STs to better prepare themselves for the following practicum by reflecting on the previous practicum experience.

In contrast, countries like Malaysia, China and Pakistan have one practicum round scheduled for the final year of the program (Endley, 2014). As has been noted earlier, the review of the literature revealed that the length of the practicum varies among the countries across the world. For example, in China, it is 8 to 10 weeks, in Canada, a minimum of 12 weeks is required, in Australia, a minimum is 7 to 11 weeks, whereas in Malaysia it is 16 weeks and in Pakistan it is 4 to 8 weeks. The review of literature also



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indicated that among the countries studied, Malaysia has the longest and Pakistan has the shortest practicum (Endley, 2014; Gujjar, Naoreen, & Bajwa, 2010; Min, Abdulla, Mansor, & Shamsudin, 2014; Mitchell, Clarke, & Nuttall, 2007).

Many authors have argued that having a lengthy practicum helps the STs to develop their teaching career in many ways. In this regard, Zeichner (2006) pointed out that having an extended experience with expert teachers during the practicum enhances STs professional development through constant revision and refinement of their teaching skills. It also provides greater opportunities for the STs to experiment and practice many theories that they have learned from on-campus theory classes and hence, helps in bridging the theory-practice divide (Wyss, Siebert, & Dowling, 2012). Darling-Hammond and Bransford (2005), cited in Ure (2009), noted that the length of time spent in placement schools has a significant impact on STs self-confidence and their capacity to link theory and practice. STs who had longer practicum seem to be more confident in teaching and also they build a stronger connection with theory and practice. Therefore, in this respect, it can be concluded that a 12-week long practicum is advantageous compared with a four-week practicum in many regards. However, we must also be aware of Britzman's caution that not just any 'practice makes perfect' but rather 'good practice makes perfect' (Britzman, 1991).

Additionally, STs who had practicum concurrently with ongoing on-campus theory classes have added advantages. For example, Ure (2009) noted that having practicum concurrently with theory classes enable the STs to better understand and explore the link between theory and practice and thus, assists them to become reflective practitioners. At the same time, from the findings of this study, it is evident that these STs lack multiple exposure to various contexts as they were placed in one placement school for the extended practicum. According to Ure (2009), exposure to multiple contexts has a significant impact on the overall professional development of STs. Therefore, having refrained from multiple practicum exposures, these STs may have limited understanding of the teaching profession based only on the culture and practices of their placement schools. In other words, their understanding of the profession from a broader context is minimized.

In contrast, STs who had multiple exposures to multiple contexts at different points of the timing of the program had valuable opportunities to explore and experience in various placement schools across the country – the schools in Male city and in islands communities. As Manzar-Abbas and Lu (2013) pointed out, having multiple exposures to various contexts, these STs have added advantages. For example, they get the chance to explore the diversity of learning needs of the pupils from various schools across the country. In addition, having one practicum round each academic year provides opportunities to experiment with the theoretical knowledge discussed in the on-campus classes and thus helps to reduce the theory-practice divide that often exists in teacher education. In contrast, STs who had only one practicum conducted in placement schools in Male' City area hindered the professional development of STs and their understanding of the school cultures and teaching practices across the country.

In brief, from the findings of this empirical research, it can be concluded that at the time of data collection, different teacher education programs in the Maldives have different practicum structures, which might be attributed to the lack of a national-level framework on practicum as well as the absence of a governing body that regulates and standardizes the teacher education programs, especially the practicum, across various teacher education institutions in the Maldives. Therefore, this study suggests that the relevant authorities should formulate a framework on practicum as an initial step, which then need to be followed by the establishment of departments or governing bodies to oversee the practicum programs conducted by various teacher education institutions in the Maldives. In addition, it was also revealed that most of the teacher education programs offered an integrated practicum model in which STs have multiple exposures to a range of practicum settings, or conduct practicum concurrently with on-campus theory classes. At the same time, although some programs had multiple practicum exposures, the literature suggests that having a longer extended practicum is important for STs to redefine and refine their teaching and learning skills. Therefore, based on the existing literature together with the findings of this empirical research, the study suggests that programs with short practicum rounds may need to seek possibilities to extend the current duration of at least one of the practicum rounds to better prepare the STs as effective future classroom teachers.

## 5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The research findings regarding the practicum inferred that the practicum model varied among TEIs. For example, some programs had an integrated model where STs get multiple exposures to multiple contexts across the country, throughout the program in conjunction with on-campus work. This model offers several potential professional development opportunities to STs, including valuable opportunities to reduce the longstanding theory-practice gap that exists in the teacher education programs. On the other hand, there were STs who had only one practicum round scheduled in the final semester of the program which was entirely practice-based. This limits their exposure and as a result their experience is confined to the culture and practices of the particular placement school and CTs with whom they are placed.

Therefore, it is recommended in light of international literature and the findings of this empirical research to strengthen the link between theory and practice within the context of the practicum setting (that moves beyond a strictly practice-based model) to enhance the overall professional development of STs. TEIs may need to revisit and revise their teacher education programs to incorporate a more integrated practicum model, in which STs get multiple, intensive exposures to a range of practicum settings to refine and hone their teaching craft in juxtaposition to various theories. The literature attests that an early, extended and integrated

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practicum model is one of the core features of a high-quality practicum (Ingvarson, et.al, 2014). For example, Singapore, one of the high achieving countries, has adopted a highly integrated practicum model, in which a degree program has a total of 22 weeks of practicum comprised of four phases: two-week observation during the first year, five weeks as assistant teacher in the second year, five weeks as practicing teacher in the third year and 10 weeks of full time teaching practice in the final year.

In unfolding the history of teacher education in the Maldives, it is evident that the formal teacher education in the country began in 1977 with an apprenticeship model that consisted of a 19-week practicum that comprised of two phases: 'school experience program' (two blocks of seven-weeks as a teaching assistant) and 'teaching practice program' (five-weeks as a fulltime teacher). Although this model possesses several advantages, it had been revised on several occasions based on STs feedback, but none of those revisions were necessarily supported with research based evidence, especially from the Maldives itself.

Therefore, in light of the literature and illuminating the practices of high achieving countries together with the concerns raised by the STs and CTs regarding the length of the practicum, this study suggests that there is a need to revise the current practicum practices to a more integrated model such that it provides extensive exposure to school contexts and theoretical knowledge throughout the teacher education program.

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