

## An Evaluation of Special Education Practicum at King Abdulaziz University from Student Teachers' Perspectives

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**Abstract:** This study aimed to evaluate the practicum from the perspectives of student teachers in the special education department at King Abdulaziz University. The study sample consisted of 105 student teachers distributed into five tracks: learning disabilities, intellectual disability, speech and language disorders, hearing impairment, and autism disorder. The researcher prepared a questionnaire consist of 74 items distributed into 6 dimensions. Study results indicated that the evaluation of student teachers of practicum experience was generally average, and there were no statistically significant differences in the student teachers' evaluation of practicum experience depending on specialty track, practicum site, and grade point average (GPA) variables; except for the dimension of practicum benefits favoring the excellent group.

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### 1. Introduction:

In the light of rising numbers of children with special needs, and the increased services rendered to them in Saudi Arabia that leads to increased number of special education departments in the universities in Saudi Arabia. This implies that there are hundreds of student teachers' attending the practicum every year. There is a persistent need for qualified teachers who possess all knowledge and skills required for their future success in their profession, where the quality and efficiency of the teacher influence the success and development of the student more than any other factors (Billingsley & McLeskey, 2004).

O'Shea et al., (2000) indicated that the quality of the teacher depends on a high degree of the quality of the practicum course they involved in. Depending on the literature review of this topic, Otis-Wilborn and Winn (1999) indicated that there is a contradiction in the terminology used in the practicum course. The problem might be resulting from different types of practicum course in different teachers' preparation programs. Moreover there is no one distinctive term describing the same components of practicum used by professionals in the teacher's preparation field. While O'Brien et al., (2007) indicated that the practicum is located under different titles like (field experience, field work, and internship). This contradiction in terminology leads to a problem in choosing the best practices in the field of preparing teachers, cooperating teachers and the efficiency of practicum course through the different programs of teacher's preparation (O'Brien et al., 2007).

From another point of view, according to many researchers practicum was considered as one of the most important elements in the teachers' preparation

programs. (Ergenekon et al., 2008; Macy et al., 2009; Brownell et al., 2005). For that reason, student teachers usually assign a great value to practicum in their preparation programs (Giyton & McIntyre, 1990). It is considered the first experience for the student teachers in a real teaching environment (Ergenekon et al., 2008), practicum has a positive impact on the knowledge and skills of student teachers (Whitney et al., 2002). It also matches the theoretical aspect to the practical aspect through helping them to apply different teaching strategies, and gives them the chance to learn how to cope with occupational stress (Nonis & Jernice, 2011). Moreover it helps them to develop more sophisticated understandings of the teaching learning process (O'Brian et al., 2007), and enhance learning of skills needed in individualize instruction (Sears et al., 2004). Practicum also enables student teachers on how to interact with, collaborate with, and learn from experienced teachers (Prater & Sileo, 2002). Henry (1989) also indicated a group of practicum benefits: it manifests the concept of learning through experience, it improves occupational and personal development, it allows for the chance of one to one teaching, it develops a high level of satisfaction and positive feeling towards teaching as a profession, and it provides the student teacher with the chance to become a member in the group of future teachers. On the other hand practicum provides student teachers with the necessary experience for making their transition from student stage to teacher stage (Webber, 1994).

The practicum experience influences the student teachers' future decision whether or not to consider teaching as a profession. It is most likely that teachers who receive a weak preparation in the pre-service

stage will quit teaching at a rate higher than those who receive a good preparation (Darling-Hammond, 2003). In a study conducted by Connelly and Graham (2009), it was found that 20.4% of the teachers who received practicum for a period of ten weeks or less quit teaching in the special education field. It was also found that 16.3% have moved to another education-related field.

According to the literature, there are several factors influencing the success of practicum, such as; theoretical and conceptual framework of the teacher education program, the knowledge and skills of the cooperating teacher and the university supervisor, the characteristics of the practicum site and student teachers' own educational experiences (Conderman et al., 2005; Renzaglia et al., 1997).

The first element influencing the success of practicum is the theoretical preparation of the student teacher (Conderman et al., 2005). Morewood and Condo (2012) believed that effective programs are those that match the theoretical aspect with the practical aspect. Rosenkotter and Stayton (1997) indicated that there were many aspects showing the quality of practicum: First, philosophy and methods of teachers preparation programs are connected with philosophy and methods employed in the practicum; second, assignments and duties of practicum are connected with the competencies implied within the teachers preparation programs; third, various opportunities are provided for student teachers.

Brownell et al. (2005) indicated that effective teacher preparation programs include seven elements: first, a commonality of vision between coursework and practicum; second, the ability of students to connect what they learn in their courses to classroom practice; third, practicum with supervision; fourth, standards maintained by faculty for student progress; fifth, faculty assistance of students in connecting what they have learned to practice; sixth, diversity as a part of courses and practicum; seventh, collaboration as a strong part of the programs. In the same context, Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1999) suggested that teacher's knowledge could be divided into three categories: (a) knowledge in practice, (b) knowledge for practice and (c) knowledge of practice. For the effective preparation of the special education teacher, he/she must be provided with the chance to apply these three types of knowledge through the theoretical courses, practicum and different practices (Hanline, 2010). However, the results of a study conducted by Gyuton and McIntyre (1990) indicated a gap between the theoretical side and the practical side of teacher's preparation programs.

The second element influencing the practicum is the cooperating teachers. It is considered one of the influential and important elements of the success of

the practicum (Whitney et al, 2002). Johnson and Birkeland (2003) and Conderman et al., (2005) considered the cooperating teachers as mentors, facilitators of the teaching process, vital partners, observers, evaluators and supporters of the student teachers. On the other hand, O'Brian et al., (2007) indicated the roles of cooperating teachers represent the affective coaching and cognitive coaching.

Previous research has indicated that the relationship between cooperating teachers and student teachers is a primary factor in effective practicum. Behaviors from cooperating teachers that foster an effective relationship include: using positive reinforcement, the ability to communicate easily, and providing necessary support and feedback (Grisham et al., 2000; Whitney et al., 2002). In this respect, student teachers describe the cooperating teachers as being flexible, experienced, organized, effective communicators, and knowledgeable about best practices in their field. Student teachers have also expressed personal qualities of cooperating teachers as being patient, listening well and compassionate (Little & Robinson, 1997; Whitney et. al., 2002). Student teachers consider practicum a success when the cooperating teachers provide them with multiple chances to grow professionally, and frequent and constructive feedback (Johnson & Birkeland, 2003).

In spite of the effective role of the cooperating teachers, they are often being chosen for being cooperative rather than for being representative of the best practices and trends related to teachers' preparation programs (Renzaglia et al., 1997). A minority of them are prepared in the field of supervision (Meade, 1991; Kent, 2001). These problems are compounded when teacher education programs fail to provide cooperating teachers with clear direction regarding student teaching expectations (Conderman et al., 2005). Recharadson-Kohler (1988) found that student teachers attribute their behaviors and actions to the cooperating teachers instead of the preparation program they receive in college. And they imitate the behaviors of the cooperating teachers even those ones rejected by their university supervisor (Johnson, 1987). And because of this, the Council for Exceptional Children (2003) indicated that practicum must be supervised by qualified supervisors.

The third element is the university supervisors, who are the representatives of the university practicum and play the role of mentors in the evaluation of the student teachers and provide a feedback (Chalrdon State College, 2006). In their study, Rathel et al., (2008) indicated that the use of feedback about student teachers' performance in the classrooms has improved the behaviors of positive communication between student teachers and their students. Other studies (Hsu, 2005; Schwebel et al., 2002) also considered a

connection between the university and the cooperative schools, and the student teachers and the cooperating teachers. On the other hand, the university supervisors are responsible for ensuring whether the student teachers and the cooperating teachers have done their assigned duties (Henry et al., 2002). Sharp (1990) indicated a host of skills that the university supervisors would have about effective teaching practices, observation skills, conference skills and evaluation skills. However, in most cases, university supervisors are chosen upon availability not upon the supervisory skill they have (Warger & Aldinger, 1984). Some of them might be responsible for many students and, accordingly, they don't have enough time to communicate with their students effectively (Baumgart & Ferguson, 1991).

Regarding the fourth element, practicum site usually includes: educational practices that the school teachers follow, administrative style, characteristics of the student body in the school, personal characteristics of the cooperating teacher and structure of the special education classroom (Renzaglia et al., 1997; Zeichner & Gore, 1990).

The final element is the student teacher, whose role is to be an observer, an assistant teacher, a teacher and a reflective practitioner (O'Brian et al., 2007). The knowledge which the student acquires throughout the three years and a half of preparation in the college plays a role in shaping his/her attitudes, beliefs and practices about teaching as a profession (Sinclair et al., 2005).

In spite of the importance of practicum in teachers' preparation programs, we only found a few studies conducted to evaluate practicum in the special education program. Conderman et al., (2005) have conducted a study surveying faculty members of special education programs from 100 institutions in the United States in which one of the areas surveyed included supervision practices. They found that there was a disparity in the teachers' preparation programs in the grade system employed in the evaluation of student teachers. The results also indicated that traditional assignments like lesson plans preparation have been given more attention compared to the activities which imply cooperation and conference skills. Moreover, the results indicated that 80% of university supervisors made four visits for student teachers on a quarter semesters, while 33% and 28% made four and six visits to student teachers on a semester system respectively. The duration of the visits varied for supervisors as well. For example, 60% of each visit lasted between 30 to 60 minutes, 32% of each visit lasted for 30 minutes or less, 6% of each visit lasted between 60 and 90 minutes, and 2% of each visit lasted for over 90 minutes. The results also indicated that (89-94%) of special education university

supervisors provide written or verbal feedback. While 84% of them indicated that the cooperating teacher is chosen for his/her experience.

Concerning the challenges faced by those who participate in practicum, 29% of the sample faced problems related to university resources, transportation and time. 25% had a problem in choosing cooperating teachers who share the same philosophy of teachers' preparation programs. Moreover, there was also a problem related to finding a good cooperating teacher in the area of disability or the geographical area, and 19% of them have faced problems in finding the suitable practicum site. The study also found that 7% of faculty members of special education program of various institutions indicated that the teacher students themselves were the greatest teaching challenge. The pre-service special education teachers were socially and emotionally unprepared to teach, and had the impression that they would receive an A grade from their mentors or they would be allowed to student teach in their home district.

Another study conducted by Ergenekon et al., (2008) sampled 26 student teachers in the intellectual disability track at Anadolu University. The student teachers indicated a general satisfaction about practicum; they felt happy about their work in two different schools and with many students. They also indicated that they have done many assignments related to practicum like lesson plans and behavior management programs. They have received enough feedback from university supervisors. However, participants indicated that they faced difficulties in converting conceptual and behavior management courses from theory to practice. The participants had many suggestions concerning developing practicum course such as: it is necessary to include within the theoretical courses some more practical aspects; practicum supervisors should monitor a small number of student teachers and that they should model some teaching practices at the beginning of the practicum.

In the same context, a study conducted by Ozen et al., (2009) aimed to investigate the opinions of student teachers in the department of special education about the practicum schools and practicum teachers. The study sample comprised 26 student teachers specialized in intellectual disability track at Anadolu University. More than half of the sample indicated that the classroom teachers provided motivating and positive feedback. The results also indicated that the classroom teachers should provide positive model at the beginning of the practicum and whenever needed during the practicum. Moreover the student teachers' positive opinions showed that they had a good relationship with the school administration, teachers and the staff, whereas the negative opinions have been

mentioned by some of the students regarding the responsibilities they were given, and that they couldn't manage a good relationship with the staff.

O'Brian et al., (2007) investigated viewpoints of student teachers and cooperating teachers of the practicum program. The study sample included 9 student teachers and 9 cooperating teachers. The participants indicated the importance of the relationship based upon communication and confidence between the student teacher and the cooperating teacher in developing the student teacher skills. Both student teachers and cooperating teachers indicated the importance of performing definite roles for each to maximize the benefit of practicum. The study also indicated the importance of training interested parties before commencing practicum.

Another study conducted by Nonis and Jenice (2011) aimed to investigate the student teachers' opinions in the department of special education about the practicum program. The study sample comprised 33 student teachers. They indicated that they received positive experience from practicum. 91% of the student teachers indicated that practicum has helped them in understanding the learning needs of their students, while 88% of them indicated that practicum has helped them in determining the problems facing their students in the classroom and having a better understanding of their social needs. 91% of student teachers indicated that practicum has helped them in understanding the individualized educational plan (IEP) and in writing lesson plans. 85% of student teachers indicated that the practicum helped them in understanding the diagnostic summaries. 77% of them indicated that it helped them to understand the culture of the school where they received training. 91% of them indicated that practicum helped them to make connections between the theoretical aspect and the practical aspect in the class room. 91% of them indicated that they received a good support from the cooperating teacher and the university supervisor. 91% of student teachers indicated that practicum has provided them with the experience they needed in their area of specialization. 91% of student teachers indicated that practicum helped them to try different teaching strategies. 88% of them indicated that practicum gave them time to reflect on lesson delivery.

Also the results showed (82-94%) of student teachers indicated that the university supervisor, cooperating teacher and school supervisor do understand practicum procedures and that they conveyed to them the practicum procedures, they maintained a good relationship with them and that they gave them enough support. The student teachers clarified that the factors made them enjoy practicum were: the support they received pertaining to the strategies for helping them to organize and deliver

their lessons, getting constructive feedback from the university supervisor and the school supervisor to improve their performance, the good rapport with the university supervisor, the school supervisor and the cooperating teacher and receiving positive support through cooperation and mentoring. On the other hand, the factors which made them feel uncomfortable during practicum were: a need to handle too much paperwork for practicum, receiving limited support from school and cooperating teacher to prepare well for Practicum, the time to observe pupils to determine their educational needs and to prepare the lesson plans was inadequate, and handling pupils with different educational needs was a challenge.

In a study conducted by Beck (2009) the student teachers indicated that they had a benefit from the feedback they received from university supervisor and cooperating teacher in facilitating their teaching skills. The study results also showed that high achieving group generally stayed high and above the low achieving group, and those university supervisors and the cooperating teachers had high agreement in their evaluations of the pre-service teachers.

Another study conducted by Al Jabery and Al Khamara (2013) examined special education students' satisfaction in Jordan University about practicum. The study sample was comprised of 50 student teachers distributed into three categories: intellectual disability, autism disorder and learning disabilities. The results indicated that student teachers were unsatisfied about practicum, where the degree of satisfaction ranged between low and average. The study also didn't find any significant differences in the degree of satisfaction according to their category choice of disability. Concerning practicum structure, 67% of student teachers indicated a disconnection between requirements of the practicum (e. g. assignments) and university courses, 43% expressed some distress over requirements of practicum and 38% of the students complained about the practicum workload and duration.

In the area of supervision, 35% of student teachers indicated inadequacy in the number of visits supervisors paid them. 15% of teacher students indicated insufficient feedback they got from the supervisors. Regarding the cooperating teachers, 30% of student teachers indicated that cooperating teachers were not providing them with the necessary practical support; while 25% of them indicated that the cooperating teacher was reluctant in granting them teaching responsibilities. The student teachers also indicated that 17% of cooperating teachers were fresh graduates who had no experience, and 12% indicated that cooperating teachers were not specializing in special education and 7% had negative attitudes about teacher students. Concerning the practicum site, 76%

of student teachers indicated difficulties in transportation, and 36% indicated that the practicum site was not suitable. 65% of student teachers were not happy with the general atmosphere in the site of practicum. 46% of them indicated the absence of team work, and 61% of them criticized being engaged in activities irrelevant to their area of practicum.

#### **Description of the practicum course:**

Special education department at King Abdulaziz University presents a four year program to prepare teachers in the following tracks: learning disabilities, intellectual disability, speech and language disorders, hearing impairment, and autism disorder. Practicum is one of the requirements of the program, where the student joins this course in his final semester after finishing all theoretical courses. The practicum is comprised of 16 training weeks which are equivalent to 8 credit hours. The practicum unit in the faculty of education sends student teachers to institutes serve the children with special needs, in both private and public institutes, for six- day full time work every week. Through the training period, the student is required to fulfill several requirements: indentifying the institute's system and preparing a report about it, applying formal and informal tools of diagnosis, preparing the individualized educational program, preparing the behavior modification plan, preparing an informative leaflet about the category of disability he is teaching, participating in the extracurricular activities launched in the institute, and attending the weekly meetings of the department. The student teachers are supervised by faculty members who are specialized in that track and who will make several field visits not less than four visits through one semester. In those visits the student teachers should be evaluated using a standard form. The cooperating teachers participate in evaluating the student teachers using a standard form as well. At the end of the practicum the supervisors assigns the students an 80 point grade distributed over the duties which the student teachers were expected to perform in light of the field observations which the supervisors have on the student teachers throughout the semester. The cooperating teachers and the schools principals assign the student teachers a grade of 20 points over the observations they made on the students throughout the semester.

#### **Significance of the study:**

The special education department at King Abdulaziz University is considered one of the best special education departments in Saudi Arabia. It was launched 13 years ago, and so far, no scientific study has been done to evaluate practicum course. On the other hand, practicum is one of the essential components of special education teachers' preparation programs. Therefore, this study aimed to investigate the opinions of special education department students

enrolled to practicum in 2012-2013, in order to identify strengths and weaknesses of this program, that will enhance the department to improve areas of weakness through reviewing the components of practicum in light of the best practices in this area in order to prepare teachers to gain all the necessary knowledge and skills for their future profession.

Therefore, this study aimed to answer the following questions:

1. What opinions do student teachers hold regarding evaluation of the practicum?
2. Are there any significant differences in student teachers evaluations based on specialty track, grade point average (GPA) and the practicum site variables?

#### **2. Methodology:**

##### **Research Design:**

A quantitative research methodology was utilized within this research study to evaluate practicum from the viewpoint of student teachers in the department of special education at King Abdulaziz University.

##### **Study Population:**

The study sample consists of all practicum male students in the first and second semesters of 2012-2013 (n=105). The study sample is distributed over 30 government institutes serve the children with special needs. Table 1 provides the sample distribution over the study variables.

##### **Study Instrument:**

A questionnaire for the current study was developed in light of previous studies and books in the area of practicum example: (Nonis & Jernice, 2011; Beck, 2009; Al Otaibi et al, 2005). It consists of two sections; first is the demographic variables: specialty track, practicum site and grade point average (GPA). The second is the practicum evaluation questionnaire which is comprised of 74 items distributed over the following dimensions: practicum unit, university supervisor, cooperating teacher, school Principal, practicum site, and practicum benefits. In order to answer the questionnaire's items, likert scale was employed as follows: (1= low, 2= average and 3= High). For the purpose of determining the degree of practicum evaluation, the following standards were used as a cut point: lower than 1.66 (low), from 1.67 to 2.33 (average), and higher than 2.34 (high).

The face validity of the current study questionnaire was verified by a group of professors (eight professors) trained in the field of special education who rated the clarity and appropriateness of the scale statements. Based on the group's observations and suggestions, necessary adjustments were made, and some phrases were rephrased. After implementing the professors' suggestions, their percentage of agreement reached 80%. On the other

hand, the reliability for the internal consistency of the study instrument was measured by Cronbach Alpha

with a value reached (0.89).

Table 1: Distribution of the Study Sample According to the Variables of the Study.

Variable		Number	Total
Specialty Track	Learning Disabilities	31	105
	Intellectual Disability	20	
	Speech and Language Disorders	29	
	Hearing Impairment	15	
	Autism Disorder	10	
Practicum Site	Special Education Institute	48	105
	Mainstreaming School	57	
Grade Point Average (GPA)	Excellent	20	105
	Very Good	67	
	Good	18	

#### Data Collection Procedures:

After making an inventory of the number of student teachers involved in the practicum course, they were asked to answer the questionnaire in order to evaluate their experience in the practicum at the end of the first semester and at the end of the second semester of the academic year 2012-2013.

#### Data analysis:

The data were entered and analyzed using the statistical package for the social sciences (SPSS-20.0). Descriptive statistics (e.g. frequencies, means, standard deviations, and percentages) were presented in the results section. In addition, one way ANOVA was used to test for any statistically significant differences between student teachers specialty track and GPA variables, and independent samples *t* test was used to test for any statistically significant differences between student teachers site practicum variable. The least significant difference (LSD) test was also used to determine the significance of differences relevant to the GPA variable.

### 3. Results:

The first research question pertaining to this study aimed to determine student teachers evaluation of the practicum. Table 2 shows student teachers evaluation of practicum experience, the mean score was (2.07), which was average according to the above mentioned criteria. Concerning the dimensions of the scale, the means were between low and average.

As shown in table 2 the dimension number six (practicum benefits) had the highest mean score (2.24), followed by the dimension number two (university supervisor), mean score (2.20). On the other hand, the dimension number one (practicum unit) had the lowest mean score (1.61), followed by

the dimension number five (practicum site) with a mean score of (1.89). Moreover, on the item level, we found that the item number (41) (my university supervisor treats me respectfully), had the highest mean score (2.63), followed by the items (14, 66, 21, 51) respectively ( my university supervisor requires a lot of paperwork for practicum, practicum helped me on how to write lesson plans, my university supervisor provides me with verbal and written feedback at the end of each teaching session, and the school Principal following-up of the administrative procedures related to me such as attendance). We also found that the item number (1) (Practicum unit provides me with an introductory course before being involved in the practicum), had the lowest mean score (1.10 ) followed by the items (7, 2, 5, 60) in order (practicum unit holds a meeting at the end of the practicum to take our suggestions and feedback into consideration, practicum unit provides me with a practicum guide, practicum unit defines the distribution criteria to the practicum sites, and work in a practicum site is characterized by team spirit). The second question of this research aimed to investigate any potential differences between student teachers scores on the dimensions and the 'overall' evaluation of practicum depending on (specialty track, GPA and practicum site) variables. For the first variable (specialty track), means and standard deviations for the dimensions and the 'overall' evaluation were extracted for student teachers groups (intellectual disability, learning disabilities, autism disorder, hearing impairment, and speech and language disorders) as shown in table 3 here we notice differences in the mean scores between student teachers groups in all dimensions and the 'overall' mean score.

Table 2: Mean, Std., Number, and Percentage for Each Item of the Questionnaire for all Study Sample									
N.	Dimension	High		Average		Low		Mean	Std.
		N	%	N	%	N	%		
	<b>Practicum Unit</b>							1.61	.364
1	It provides me with an introductory course before being involved in the practicum	0	0	11	10.5	94	89.5	1.10	.308
2	It provides me with a practicum guide	5	4.8	21	20.0	79	75.2	1.30	.553
3	It understands the problems that face me during practicum and trying to solve them	10	9.5	28	26.7	67	63.8	1.46	.665
4	It provides me with a sufficient support related to practicum such as: financial support, and organizing schedule within college	36	34.3	45	42.9	24	22.9	2.11	.751
5	It defines the distribution criteria to the practicum sites	11	10.5	21	20.0	73	69.5	1.41	.675
6	It provides me with an enrollment letter to the practicum sites	21	20.0	31	29.5	53	50.5	1.70	.786
7	It holds a meeting at the end of the practicum to take our suggestions and feedback into consideration	2	1.9	24	22.9	79	75.2	1.27	.486
8	It facilitates communication with the unit at any time	28	26.7	29	27.6	48	45.7	1.81	.833
9	It treats me respectfully	52	49.5	38	36.2	15	14.3	2.35	.720
	<b>University Supervisor</b>							2.20	.470
10	He provides me with practicum plan.	59	56.2	27	25.7	19	18.1	2.38	.777
11	He discusses with me the requirements of practicum.	36	34.3	55	52.4	14	13.3	2.21	.661
12	The number of the supervisor's visits is sufficient.	50	47.6	33	31.4	22	21.0	2.27	.788
13	He provides me with the required forms of practicum such as: IEP and BMP	41	39.0	33	31.4	31	29.5	2.10	.827
14	He requires a lot of paperwork for practicum.	68	64.8	27	25.7	10	9.5	2.55	.665
15	He provides us with opportunities to communicate with him continuously.	39	37.1	42	40.0	24	22.9	2.14	.765
16	He discusses with the cooperating teacher the number of cases that I am supposed to work with.	50	47.6	29	27.6	26	24.8	2.23	.823
17	He provides me with sufficient support when needed.	52	49.5	31	29.5	22	21.0	2.29	.793
18	He holds scheduled meetings in faculty to discuss the practicum issues.	44	41.9	37	35.2	24	22.9	2.19	.786
19	He provides me with various resources that I need for practicum.	40	38.1	37	35.2	28	26.7	2.11	.800
20	He accepts my ideas and suggestions positively.	42	40.0	40	38.1	23	21.9	2.18	.769
21	He provides me with verbal and written feedback at the end of each teaching session.	65	61.9	31	29.5	9	8.6	2.53	.651
22	The duration of the visit is sufficient.	22	21.0	42	40.0	41	39.0	1.82	.757
23	He discusses with me the students' assessment procedures.	40	38.1	46	43.8	19	18.1	2.20	.726
24	He discusses with me the IEP preparation Procedures.	40	38.1	41	39.0	24	22.9	2.15	.769
25	He shows me the importance of practicum for the post-graduation stage.	40	38.1	36	34.3	29	27.6	2.10	.808
26	He discusses with me the final evaluation report.	35	33.3	34	32.4	36	34.3	1.99	.826
	<b>Cooperating Teacher</b>							2.14	.446
27	He gives me guidance and shows me working system used in the classroom.	52	49.5	33	31.4	20	19.0	2.30	.774
28	He provides me with needed materials and teaching aids in my work.	48	45.7	38	36.2	19	18.1	2.28	.753
29	He provides me with the required forms such as: IEP, reports.	47	44.8	28	26.7	30	28.6	2.16	.845
30	He discusses with me my scheduled classes.	58	55.2	31	29.5	16	15.2	2.40	.742
31	He helps me with the students' assessment procedures.	38	36.2	47	44.8	20	19.0	2.17	.727
32	He helps me in preparing the IEP.	22	21.0	42	40.0	41	39.0	1.82	.757
33	He helps me in preparing the BMP	28	26.7	36	34.3	41	39.0	1.88	.805
34	He allows me to communicate with him continuously	57	54.3	35	33.3	13	12.4	2.42	.704
35	He provides me with an educational environment that helps me in teaching students effectively	51	48.6	41	39.0	13	12.4	2.36	.695
36	He models the application of some instructional strategies during the practicum	15	14.3	42	40.0	48	45.7	1.69	.711
37	He observes me during teaching session	21	20.0	40	38.1	44	41.9	1.78	.759
38	He provides me with verbal and written feedback at the end of each teaching session	25	23.8	38	36.2	42	40.0	1.84	.786
39	He collaborates with the university supervisor to determine the achieved goals of the practicum.	31	29.5	38	36.2	36	34.3	1.95	.801
40	He helps me to take responsibility for classroom management gradually	34	32.4	43	41.0	28	26.7	2.06	.770
41	He treats me respectfully	76	72.4	19	18.1	10	9.5	2.63	.654
42	He helps me to solve the problems that I'm having during practicum	62	59.0	30	28.6	13	12.4	2.47	.708
43	He enhances my positive attitudes toward the teaching profession.	49	46.7	34	32.4	22	21.0	2.26	.785
44	He is aware about the practicum objectives and keen to achieve them with me.	20	19.0	43	41.0	42	40.0	1.79	.743
45	He shows me the importance of practicum for the post-graduation stage	65	61.9	21	20.0	19	18.1	2.44	.784
	<b>School or Institute Principal</b>							1.98	.335
46	He keens to familiarize me with the school rules	40	38.1	42	40.0	23	21.9	2.16	.761
47	he keens to make me aware of facilities and components of the school	19	18.1	54	51.4	32	30.5	1.88	.689
48	He treats me respectfully	45	42.9	44	41.9	16	15.2	2.28	.714
49	He facilitates communication with the him at any time	18	17.1	40	38.1	47	44.8	1.72	.740
50	He keens to involve me in non academic activities	34	32.4	42	40.0	29	27.6	2.05	.777
51	He Follows up of the administrative procedures related to me such as attendance	52	49.5	53	50.5	0	0	2.50	.502
52	He is aware of the practicum objectives and keen to achieve them with me	2	1.9	46	43.8	57	54.3	1.48	.539
53	He understands the problems that face me during practicum and tries to solve it	17	16.2	41	39.0	47	44.8	1.71	.730
54	He holds regular meetings with student teachers	11	10.5	32	30.5	62	59.0	1.51	.681
55	He asks me to attend other classes during my recess	64	61.0	34	32.4	7	6.7	2.54	.621
	<b>Practicum Site</b>							1.89	.326
56	all the necessary facilities for the application of non-academic activities are available in the practicum site	37	35.2	49	46.7	19	18.1	2.17	.713
57	The number of students in the classroom commensurate with teacher load	28	26.7	40	38.1	37	35.2	1.91	.786
58	Classrooms are equipped with furniture and tools that are necessary for the success of the educational process	21	20.0	50	47.6	34	32.4	1.88	.716

59	The location of the practicum site is close to the faculty	33	31.4	45	42.9	27	25.7	2.06	.757
60	The work in the practicum site is characterized by team spirit	7	6.7	33	31.4	65	61.9	1.45	.620
<b>Practicum Benefits</b>									
61	It Provided me with a link between theory and practice in the classroom	21	20.0	48	45.7	36	34.3	1.86	.726
62	It helped me with better understanding the characteristics and needs of my students	70	66.7	35	33.3	0	0	2.67	.474
63	It helped me to try out different strategies in teaching	39	37.1	49	46.7	17	16.2	2.21	.703
64	It helped me on how to apply formal and informal assessment tools	43	41.0	44	41.9	18	17.1	2.24	.728
65	It helped me on how to prepare IEP	53	50.5	45	42.9	7	6.7	2.44	.619
66	It helped me on how to prepare written lesson plans	60	57.1	42	40.0	3	2.9	2.54	.555
67	It helped me on how to prepare and apply BMP	29	27.6	44	41.9	32	30.5	1.97	.765
68	It helped me to understand school or institute system	44	41.9	41	39.0	20	19.0	2.23	.750
69	It helped me to be aware of tools and materials used in the teaching process specialized in the type of disability that I am working with	38	36.2	42	40.0	25	23.8	2.12	.768
70	It helped me to form positive attitudes towards education profession	52	49.5	40	38.1	13	12.4	2.37	.697
71	It helped me to gain classroom management techniques effectively	18	17.1	64	61.0	23	21.9	1.95	.626
72	It helped me on how to exploit the teaching session time effectively	43	41.0	38	36.2	24	22.9	2.18	.782
73	It helped me in building good relationship with the teachers and administrator	56	53.3	37	35.2	12	11.4	2.42	.690
74	It helped me to solve problems I faced during teaching sessions	34	32.4	53	50.5	18	17.1	2.15	.690
<b>Total</b>								2.07	.297

**Table 3: Mean, Std., Number, for the Student Teachers Responses Depending on Specialty Track Variable**

Dimension	Specialty Track	N	Mean	Std.
Practicum Unit	Intellectual Disability	21	1.73	.325
	Learning Disabilities	31	1.62	.409
	Autism Disorder	10	1.37	.166
	Hearing Impairment	15	1.59	.335
	Speech and Language Disorders	28	1.62	.383
	Total	105	1.61	.364
University Supervisor	Intellectual Disability	21	2.20	.382
	Learning Disabilities	31	2.31	.496
	Autism Disorder	10	2.01	.554
	Hearing Impairment	15	2.16	.467
	Speech and Language Disorders	28	2.18	.475
	Total	105	2.20	.470
Cooperating Teacher	Intellectual Disability	21	2.11	.332
	Learning Disabilities	31	2.30	.498
	Autism Disorder	10	2.09	.434
	Hearing Impairment	15	1.98	.378
	Speech and Language Disorders	28	2.10	.477
	Total	105	2.14	.446
School's Principal	Intellectual Disability	21	1.89	.276
	Learning Disabilities	31	2.05	.369
	Autism Disorder	10	1.90	.389
	Hearing Impairment	15	1.97	.282
	Speech and Language Disorders	28	2.02	.342
	Total	105	1.98	.335
Practicum Site	Intellectual Disability	21	1.89	.382
	Learning Disabilities	31	1.92	.326
	Autism Disorder	10	1.80	.353
	Hearing Impairment	15	1.95	.267
	Speech and Language Disorders	28	1.88	.314
	Total	105	1.89	.326
Practicum Benefits	Intellectual Disability	21	2.13	.304
	Learning Disabilities	31	2.30	.322
	Autism Disorder	10	2.26	.428
	Hearing Impairment	15	2.18	.429
	Speech and Language Disorders	28	2.29	.389
	Total	105	2.24	.364
Total	Intellectual Disability	21	2.04	.256
	Learning Disabilities	31	2.16	.321
	Autism Disorder	10	1.97	.319
	Hearing Impairment	15	2.01	.252
	Speech and Language Disorders	28	2.07	.309
	Total	105	2.07	.297

And in order to find any significant differences between student teachers groups, one way ANOVA test was used, as shown in table 4 the results indicated no significant differences between student

teachers groups' evaluations on the dimensions and the 'overall' scale.

Regarding the GPA variable means and standard deviations for the dimensions and the



‘overall’ evaluation of the student teachers groups (excellent, very good, and good) were calculated as shown in table 5 here we also notice differences in the mean scores between student teachers groups in all dimensions and the ‘overall’ mean score.

And in order to find any significant differences between student teachers groups, one way ANOVA test was used, as shown in table 6 the results in table 6 indicated that significant differences were found between student teachers groups on the sixth dimension (practicum benefits) (mean score =.695,

$F= 5.739$ , sig =.004).

In addition, Post Hoc Analysis (least significant difference) test was conducted for the comparisons between different GPA groups. As shown in table 7 the results indicated that student teachers (excellent) group had the highest score in comparison with the other student teachers groups (mean difference =.26 at  $p=.004$ ), which means the excellent student teachers group had the most favorable evaluation of the Practicum benefits dimension in comparison with the other student teachers groups.

Dimension		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Practicum Unit	Between G	.908	4	.227	1.760	.143
	Within G	12.898	100	.129		
	Total	13.806	104			
University Supervisor	Between G	.756	4	.189	.852	.496
	Within G	22.185	100	.222		
	Total	22.941	104			
Cooperating Teacher	Between G	1.227	4	.307	1.575	.187
	Within G	19.468	100	.195		
	Total	20.694	104			
School's Principal	Between G	.414	4	.103	.921	.455
	Within G	11.235	100	.112		
	Total	11.649	104			
Practicum Site	Between G	.153	4	.038	.352	.842
	Within G	10.892	100	.109		
	Total	11.045	104			
Practicum Benefits	Between G	.482	4	.120	.908	.462
	Within G	13.263	100	.133		
	Total	13.745	104			
Total	Between G	.406	4	.101	1.157	.335
	Within G	8.774	100	.088		
	Total	9.180	104			

Dimension	GPA	N	Mean	Std.
Practicum Unit	Excellent	20	1.66	.424
	Very Good	67	1.63	.340
	Good	18	1.49	.380
	Total	105	1.61	.364
University Supervisor	Excellent	20	2.31	.381
	Very Good	67	2.17	.484
	Good	18	2.18	.508
	Total	105	2.20	.470
Cooperating Teacher	Excellent	20	2.22	.374
	Very Good	67	2.15	.474
	Good	18	2.04	.414
	Total	105	2.14	.446
School's Principal	Excellent	20	2.09	.347
	Very Good	67	1.97	.303
	Good	18	1.89	.413
	Total	105	1.98	.335
Practicum Site	Excellent	20	1.99	.271
	Very Good	67	1.87	.335
	Good	18	1.89	.345
	Total	105	1.89	.326
Practicum Benefits	Excellent	20	2.47	.319
	Very Good	67	2.20	.366
	Good	18	2.12	.307
	Total	105	2.24	.364
Total	Excellent	20	2.19	.216
	Very Good	67	2.06	.304
	Good	18	1.99	.323
	Total	105	2.07	.297

Dimension		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Practicum Unit	Between G	.318	2	.159	1.202	.305
	Within G	13.488	102	.132		
	Total	13.806	104			
University Supervisor	Between G	.310	2	.155	.699	.499
	Within G	22.631	102	.222		
	Total	22.941	104			
Cooperating Teacher	Between G	.301	2	.151	.754	.473
	Within G	20.393	102	.200		
	Total	20.694	104			
School's Principal	Between G	.415	2	.207	1.884	.157
	Within G	11.234	102	.110		
	Total	11.649	104			
Practicum Site	Between G	.239	2	.119	1.126	.328
	Within G	10.807	102	.106		
	Total	11.045	104			
Practicum Benefits	Between G	1.390	2	.695	5.739	.004
	Within G	12.354	102	.121		
	Total	13.745	104			
Total	Between G	.399	2	.200	2.318	.104
	Within G	8.781	102	.086		
	Total	9.180	104			

Dependent Variable	GPA (I)	GPA (J)	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.
Practicum Benefits	Excellent	Very Good	.26(*)	.089	.004
		Good	.35(*)	.113	.003
	Very Good	Excellent	-.26(*)	.089	.004
		Good	.08	.092	.362
Good	Excellent	-.35(*)	.113	.003	
	Very Good	-.08	.092	.362	

For the third variable (practicum site), means and standard deviations for the dimensions and the 'overall' evaluation were extracted for student teachers groups (special education institute, and mainstreaming school) as shown in table 8 her we noticed differences in the mean scores between student teachers groups in all dimensions and

'overall' mean score.

And in order find any significant differences between student teachers groups, t test was used, as shown in table 8 results in table 8 indicated no significant differences between student teachers groups' evaluations on the dimensions and the 'overall' scale.

Dimension	Variables	N	Mean	Std.	t	df	Sig.
Practicum Unit	Special Education Institute	48	1.63	.331	.522	103	.603
	Mainstreaming School	57	1.59	.393			
University Supervisor	Special Education Institute	48	2.16	.420	-.845	103	.400
	Mainstreaming school	57	2.24	.509			
Cooperating Teacher	Special Education Institute	48	2.11	.367	-.690	103	.492
	Mainstreaming School	57	2.17	.505			
School's principal	Special Education Institute	48	1.98	.311	-.161	103	.872
	Mainstreaming School	57	1.99	.356			
Practicum Site	Special Education Institute	48	1.87	.328	-.768	103	.444
	Mainstreaming School	57	1.92	.325			
Practicum Benefits	Special Education Institute	48	2.23	.353	-.188	103	.851
	Mainstreaming School	57	2.25	.375			
Total	Special Education Institute	48	2.05	.256	-.619	103	.537
	Mainstreaming School	57	2.09	.329			

#### 4. Discussion:

The current study aimed to evaluate the practicum course from the Perspectives of student teachers in the department of special education at King Abdulaziz University. Moreover, this study attempts to investigate the potential differences in the student teachers evaluation of the practicum according to the specialty track, GPA, and practicum site variables.

Generally, the study results indicated that the evaluation of student teachers of the practicum experience was (average), the dimension of practicum benefits was ranked first, as (66.7%) of student teachers indicated that it helped them a lot in understanding the characteristics and needs of their students. This could be attributed to the fact that the practicum provides the student teachers with the opportunity to interact and deal with this particular category of students in a real teaching environment, either through the teaching sessions or in practicing extracurricular activities; whereas, (57.1) of student teachers indicated that the practicum has helped them in the way they prepare and apply daily lesson plans as well as the individualized educational plan. This can be attributed to the fact that these skills are being taken care of by the cooperating teachers and the university supervisors where they are considered the main area of focus for working with students inside the classroom. Those results were in agreement with Nonis, Jernice (2011) study which clarified that student teachers gained a positive experience from the practicum which helped them understand the needs of the category of students they are dealing with and also helped them to understand how to prepare the individualized educational plan (IEP).

Moreover (34.3%) of student teachers indicated a weak connection between the theoretical courses and the practicum requirements. This can be attributed to the lack of activities and practices within the theoretical courses, and the focus only on the traditional activities to evaluate the students during studying the theoretical course like participation in class discussions and periodical exams. This agrees somehow with Al Jaberi & Al Khamra (2013) study which found that most of their study participants indicated that there was a disconnection between the theoretical courses and the practicum course. According to Sinclair et al., (2005) the student teachers should be provided with different teaching strategies and more practical courses. Also Rosenkotter and Stayton (2007) indicated that the quality of practicum depends on philosophy and methods of teachers' preparation programs that are connected with philosophy and methods employed in the practicum course. (30.5%) of student teachers indicated that the practicum poorly helped them to prepare and apply the behavior modification plan. This

might be attributed to the fact that teacher preparation program is limited to one behavior modification course. Behavior modification programs also require long periods of time to determine the behavior and to apply the behavior modification program. All this can't be achieved within the actual practicum period of 12 weeks. This result was confirmed by Ergenekon et al. (2008) indicating that the participants faced difficulties in converting conceptual and behavior management courses from theory to practice.

The dimension of university supervisor was ranked secondly, as (56.2%) of student teachers indicated that the university supervisors provide them with practicum plan; (47.6%) indicated that the number of the university supervisors visits were sufficient, and (61.9%) indicated that the university supervisors provided them with written or verbal feedback at the end of the teaching session. This could be attributed to the fact that the ones who supervise the practicum are faculty members who hold a doctoral degree in special education, and they, in turn, have enough experience to supervise and follow student teachers during the practicum period. This agrees with the results of Nonis, Jernice's (2011) study which indicated that (91%) of the participants received enough support from the university supervisor, and agrees with other studies conducted by (Coderman et al., 2005; Ergenekon et al., 2008).

On the other hand, (39.0%) of student teachers indicated the insufficient time assigned for the field visit by their supervisors. This might be attributed to the teaching and administrative loads that supervisors had. And that the university supervisors might be supervising a large number of student teachers and accordingly cannot attend the whole teaching session. Moreover, (64.8%) of student teachers indicated that their supervisors assign them many works during the practicum. This might be attributed to the nature of the practicum requirements included in the plan, and to the supervisors' willingness to help the students to achieve the maximum objectives of the practicum. This might be attributed to the shortness of the practicum period, as it doesn't allow achieving all objectives. In addition to this most student teachers have other courses to attend parallel to the practicum which in turn reduces the number of hours spent by the student in the practicum. This result was confirmed by Nonis, Jernice's (2011) study which indicates that the student teachers reported the needs to handle too much paperwork for Practicum.

The dimension of cooperating teacher was ranked thirdly, as (72.4%) of student teachers believed that the cooperating teachers treated them respectfully; while (59.0%) said that the cooperating teachers helped them to solve problems they faced in their practicum. And (61.9%) of them said that the

cooperating teachers clarified the importance of the practicum after their graduation. This might be due to the fact that cooperating teachers had the same experience through their university studies and, accordingly, they are aware of the importance of practicum for the student teachers for the post graduation period. That's why they encourage them to take care of the practicum course. This matches up with the results of Nonis, Jernice's (2011) study which indicates that (91%) of the participants reported that they received enough support from the cooperating teachers. Also a study conducted by O'Brian et al. (2007) indicated the importance of the relationship between the cooperating teachers and the student teachers in maximizing the benefits of practicum.

On the other hand (45.7%) of student teachers indicated that the cooperating teachers didn't model enough number of teaching strategies during the practicum and (40.0%) of them indicated that the cooperating teachers didn't provide them with enough feedback at the end of the teaching session. This might be due to the load of teaching and administrative works assigned to the cooperating teachers by the school principals and the district's supervisors. In most cases the cooperating teachers are chosen upon their collaboration and not upon their knowledge and experience in the field or the training courses they attended in the area of supervision. This result agreed with Al Jaber and Al Khamra (2013) study which indicates that thirty percent of student teachers reported that the cooperating teachers didn't provide them with the necessary practical support.

(40.0%) of student teachers indicate that the cooperating teachers don't have enough awareness of objectives and requirements of the practicum. This might be due to lack of communication between the practicum unit in the university and the collaborative schools in specifying to the cooperating teachers their roles and responsibilities towards the student teachers to help them to achieve the objectives of the practicum. This also might be attributed to the fact that the university doesn't offer financial incentives to the cooperating teachers in return of their collaboration which, in turn, affects their motivation to work with student teachers to achieve the objectives of the practicum. This result contradicts the result of Nonis, Jernice's (2011) study which indicated that (82-94%) of the cooperating teachers do understand the practicum's procedures.

The dimension of school's principal was ranked fourthly, as (50.5%) of student teachers indicated that the schools principals follow up the administrative procedures related to them like attendance and absence. This might be due to the fact that the Schools principals treat the student teachers the same way as they treat the regular school teachers. Also the goal of

that might be to familiarize the student teachers with discipline and regular attendance. (42.9%) of student teachers indicated that the schools principals treat them respectfully. A study by Ozen et al., (2009) confirmed that by indicating that the student teachers had a good relationship with the schools principals. And (40.0%) of them indicated that the schools principals has worked to acquaint them with the school rules. This might be attributed to the nature of practicum as the first experience of the student as a teacher in a real educational environment. That is why the school principal is keen to familiarize them with its effective order in order to minimize mistakes that could be committed by the student teachers in the school, which, in turn, raises their capabilities to perform their occupational duties in a responsible manner. On the other hand, (61.0%) of student teachers indicated that the schools principals assigns them to attend other classes during their recess. The schools principals might resorts to this option in the event of having absent regular teachers. Those results agree with the findings of Al Jaber and Al Khamra (2013) study that the schools principals assign student teachers a duty of attending to classes in the recess. Moreover (54.3%) of student teachers indicated that the schools principals are poorly aware of the objectives of the practicum. This might be attributed to the weak communication between the practicum unit in the university and the schools principals. The unit doesn't provide the cooperative schools with enough directions concerning its duties and responsibilities toward the student teachers. (59%) of student teachers also indicated that the schools principals don't hold enough number of meetings with them. This might be due to the great responsibilities of the administrations as they don't have enough time to hold such meetings periodically.

The dimension of practicum site was ranked fifthly, as (46.7%) of student teachers indicated that the practicum sites have the facilities required to perform extracurricular activities, and (47.6%) indicated that classrooms have the equipments and furniture required for the success of the teaching process. While (42.9%) of student teachers indicated that the practicum sites were close to the University; whereas (25.7%) of them indicated that they are far from the university. In fact, the practicum unit works hard to choose practicum sites that are close to the university; but due to the rising numbers of student teachers enrolled in the practicum course, far locations were chosen as practicum sites. It is also worth mentioning that the choice of the practicum sites is made upon the willingness of these schools to cooperate with the university.

Moreover (61.9%) of student teachers indicated the absence of teamwork spirit in the practicum sites.

This could be attributed to personal factors related to the rejection of the idea of cooperative work and preferring the individual work. It might also be attributed to the willingness of each employee to show his efforts individually in front of his supervisors. The schools principals as well don't support the idea of teamwork. This result agrees with Al Jaber and Al Khamra (2013) study.

The practicum unit dimension came lastly, as (49.5%) of student teachers indicated that they were treated respectfully. and (42.9%) of students indicated that the support they received from the practicum unit was sufficient. This may be related to the financial aid provided to the students by the university to help them to cover practicum's expenses. Practicum Unit also coordinates with the Enrollment Unit to organize the courses' timetable for the students assigned for the practicum course where most of the theoretical credit courses were scheduled in the evening in order to enable the students to spend the credit hours on site. On the other hand, (89.5%) of student teachers, indicated that the practicum unit didn't provide them with an introductory course before attending the practicum. This could be attributed to the belief of the practicum unit that it is the responsibility of the special education department to hold such courses. And (75.2%) of teacher students indicated that the practicum unit didn't provide them with the practicum manual. This is mainly attributed to the absence of a special education practicum manual explaining all roles and responsibilities of all parties involved in the practicum process. The practicum unit provides students with a general manual for all educational tracks, where this manual could not fit the special education discipline due to its uniqueness.

Concerning the second question of the current study, the results indicated no statistically significant differences concerning the student teachers' evaluation of practicum experience related to specialty track, this may be related to the similarity of practicum requirements between all disciplines. Concerning student teachers' evaluation of the practicum site variable. The study results indicated no statistically significant differences between the special education institutes and mainstreaming schools. This might be attributed to the fact that all of these institutions are run by the government and, accordingly, it is most likely that they are equipped with the same facilities, and that the staff in these institutions are subjected to the same regulations and procedures issued by the Ministry of Education. The study results indicated no statistically significant differences concerning the student teachers evaluation of practicum experience related to GPA variable; except for the dimension of practicum benefits favoring the excellent group. This could be related to the fact that the excellent group

was more knowledgeable and had more motivation towards high achievement scores. That agrees with Beck (2009) study.

#### **Conclusion:**

The main conclusion of this study was that the student teachers' evaluation of the practicum experience was generally average. The results of the study showed no statistically significant differences in student teachers' evaluation of practicum experience depending on specialty track, practicum site, or GPA variables; except for the dimension of the practicum benefits favoring the excellent group. In order to raise the effectiveness of the practicum course, a better connection is required between theory courses and the practical aspects; practicum guide should be prepared in special education which highlights practicum requirements, duties of interested parties, raising the level of cooperation between the university and cooperating institutions. And lowering the number of student teachers assigned for each university supervisor. Concerning future studies, the practicum is to be evaluated according to the point of view of the cooperating teacher, university supervisor, and school principal.

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