

Discovering the Realities of Teaching: Exploring the Practice Teaching Experiences of Pre-service Teachers

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Abstract –Practice Teaching is a crucial element in the pre-service education of would-be teachers. It provides authentic experiences in an actual classroom and school environment and provides the pre-service teacher a smooth role transition from student to teacher. This paper looked into the difficulties experienced by pre-service teachers in their Practice Teaching in terms of planning teaching-learning activities, teaching strategies, classroom management, assessment of students' learning, communication skills, personal competencies, and occupational skills. This study also identified the extent of the contribution of various factors to the Practice Teaching experiences. The quantitative and qualitative data were gathered through a survey and focus group discussion from 156 pre-service teachers in a state college in the Philippines. Difficulties encountered primarily focused on planning activities relevant to the lesson, particularly the choice of teaching methods and strategies appropriate for the learners and the subject matter. Another area of difficulty was on classroom management, specifically on maintaining the discipline of learners and handling their misbehaviors. Pre-service teachers expressed that the demonstration teaching opportunities during the pre-practicum phase, the actual teaching during the practicum phase, and the exit conference with the cooperating teachers and school heads during the post-practicum phase have contributed much to their Practice Teaching. The Practice Teaching program can be enhanced through pre-service seminars, additional Practice Teaching coordinators proportionate to the number of pre-service teachers, and a well-organized mentoring program.

Keywords –cooperating teachers, practice teaching, teacher training, teaching-learning activities

INTRODUCTION

The National Higher Education Research Agenda (NEHRA) identifies teacher training as a priority area for research [1]. Crucial in teacher training is the pre-service education, which refers to the four-year college education in a teacher training institution. Practice Teaching is an essential aspect of pre-service education when pre-service teachers play the dual roles of a student and a teacher. It is in the final phase of pre-service teacher education where their knowledge and skills are tested in the real school and classroom environment through the application of educational principles and theories [2].

Practice Teaching is a terminal course in teacher education programs in the Philippines [3], [4]. The pre-service teachers should have taken all the subjects in the curriculum before they will be allowed to embark on teaching in an authentic school setting [3], [4]. Section 1 of Commission on Higher Education (CHED) Memorandum Order No. 104, Series of 2017 states that the internship program, also called Practice Teaching or Student Teaching, provides students with an opportunity to complement their formal learning with practical knowledge, skills, and desirable attitudes and to gain hands-on experience in a Host Training Establishment or HTE [5]. In teacher training, the HTEs are called cooperating schools that are usually public or private schools or the basic education department or laboratory school of a college or university.

The concept of Practice Teaching is anchored on the Situated Learning Theory of Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger. The theory was based on the assumption that knowledge should be presented in an authentic context that involves its application [6]. The need for social interaction is an essential component of situated learning [6], [7]. Learners become a full participant in a community of practice that embodies certain beliefs and behaviors to be acquired [6], [7]. In

Practice Teaching, pre-service teachers become part of a school community wherein they learn and apply content, strategies, and skills and acquire certain practices of the system and values that people around them uphold. Their exposure to a real school setting is vital for it validates and deepens what they have learned in the teacher education curriculum.

As pre-service teachers undergo Practice Teaching, they are subjected to experiences in various aspects of a teacher's work. Teacher training institutions need to examine these experiences in an authentic environment, particularly those that were found difficult by pre-service teachers and the factors that contributed to these experiences. These are valuable inputs for the assessment and enhancement of the Practice Teaching Programs of institutions. Moreover, these are crucial information needed in curriculum review and the planning and administration of programs and activities that will enhance the different phases of Practice Teaching. Through meaningful experiences in Practice Teaching, pre-service teachers may develop positive attitudes for the teaching profession.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This study was conducted to determine the extent of the difficulties experienced by elementary education pre-service teachers during their Practice Teaching in areas such as (a) planning teaching-learning activities, (b) teaching strategies, (c) classroom management, (d) assessment of students' learning, (e) communication skills, (f) personal competencies, and (g) occupational skills. Alongside with the difficulties, the study aimed to identify the extent of contribution of the factors to their Practice Teaching experiences in the (a) pre-practicum phase, (b) practicum phase, and (c) post-practicum phase.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Research Design

This study used the mixed-method research, which involves the collection, analysis, and interpretation of quantitative and qualitative data in one study [8].

Participants

All of the 156 elementary education pre-service teachers of a state college who had their Practice Teaching in the second semester of the school year 2019-2020 were involved in the study. Hence, complete enumeration, specifically purposive sampling, was utilized. Of the 156 pre-service

teachers, 125 were respondents of the survey for the quantitative data, while 31 were part of the Focus Group Discussion (FGD) for the qualitative data.

Data Gathering Procedure

The quantitative data were collected through a survey questionnaire. The items included in the research instrument were taken from the indicators in the rating form used by cooperating teachers to evaluate pre-service teachers' teaching performance. The said form had been used for several years by cooperating teachers or mentors to assess pre-service teachers' teaching performance. Through the years, comments and suggestions given by cooperating teachers have been considered to improve the items in the form.

A Focus Group Discussion (FGD) was conducted to generate qualitative data from pre-service teachers. The data from the FGD verified, validated, or strengthened some of the quantitative data derived from the survey.

Ethics in research was considered in this study. A cover letter was included in the first part of the survey questionnaire informing the respondents of the nature and objectives of the study, the assurance of the confidentiality of the data, and its use only for its intended purpose. In the Focus Group Discussion (FGD), the participants were also informed of the dialogue's objectives. They were assured of their anonymity in the entire study so they could freely share their practice teaching experiences.

Data Analysis

The first part of the survey consisted of items on the difficulties experienced by pre-service teachers in planning the teaching-learning activities, teaching strategies, classroom management, assessment of students' learning, communication skills, personal competencies, and occupational skills. The weighted mean of each item was computed, and data were interpreted based on a four-point Likert scale: 3.51-4.0: always; 2.51-3.5: sometimes; 1.51-2.5: seldom; and 1.0-1.5: never. The second part of the survey was on the extent of contribution of identified factors to Practice Teaching. Weighted mean for each item was also computed and data were interpreted based on a four-point Likert scale: 3.51-4.0: much; 2.51-3.5: moderate; 1.51-2.5: little; and 1.0-1.5: not at all.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Areas and Extent of Difficulties Experienced by Pre-

Service Teachers

The succeeding paragraphs present the data on the areas and extent of difficulties experienced by the elementary education pre-service teachers in different areas.

A. Planning the Teaching-Learning Activities

Data on Table 1 shows that in the area of planning the teaching-learning activities, pre-service teachers sometimes found it difficult to state appropriate objectives for the lesson (3.24). However, they always encountered difficulties in planning activities relevant to the lesson (3.60) and choosing methods suited to the learners and subject matter (3.61).

Table 1. Difficulties Experienced by Pre-Service Teachers in Planning the Teaching-Learning Activities

Indicators	M	I
Stating appropriate objectives for the lesson	3.24	Sometimes
Planning activities relevant to the lesson	3.60	Always
Choosing methods suited to the learners and subject matter	3.61	Always

These findings were validated in the focus group discussion when some students shared their experiences.

“Most of us had difficulty in writing lesson plans used in our cooperating schools. It was different from what we learned in our college courses. I felt pressured in thinking of appropriate activities for the learners. Our cooperating teachers and school principal had to teach us how to write lesson plans using the prescribed format.”

“There were several students who do not know how to read even if they were already in sixth grade. It was difficult to think of ways on how they can cope with the lesson and the appropriate method to use for them.”

The results imply that the pre-service teachers were not familiar with the new lesson plan format used in their assigned schools. However, they were helped by their cooperating teachers and principals through orientations and mentoring activities. Once the pre-service teachers have learned how to write lesson

plans in the prescribed format, some encountered challenges in choosing methods suitable to the diverse learners.

A pre-service teacher, however, had a different experience after preparing lesson plans. She narrated the following during the focus group discussion:

“I was asked to prepare lesson plans for topics at the primary level that I was assigned. On the following day, I was supposed to teach the lessons, but I was informed that I was assigned to another grade level. The lesson plans and instructional materials I prepared were not used.”

These experiences posted challenges to pre-service teachers since lesson plans are crucial in the teaching-learning process. These experiences were also noted in the study of Takaoglu [9] when pre-service teachers experienced some difficulties in formatting lesson plans and designing the educational process. However, this is contrary to the experience of pre-service teachers in Tanzania, who found it easier to prepare lesson plans than teaching aids [10]. Effective lesson plans are important in setting learning goals and determining activities to achieve the identified goals [11].

B. Teaching Strategies

Data on Table 2 presents the difficulties encountered by pre-service teachers in teaching strategies. Pre-service teachers always faced problems in using varied teaching strategies and techniques (3.64). Analysis of this finding shows that their difficulty in using strategies and techniques is parallel to the challenges they always experience in planning activities and choosing methods as they prepare their lesson plans.

Table 2. Difficulties Experienced by Pre-Service Teachers in Teaching Strategies

Indicators	M	I
Demonstrating mastery of the subject matter	3.12	Sometimes
Using varied teaching strategies	3.64	Always
Motivating learners to participate	3.24	Sometimes
Developing instructional materials	3.12	Sometimes

Indicators such as motivating learners to participate (3.24) and demonstrating mastery of the subject matter (3.12) were rated by the pre-service

teachers as difficulties they experienced sometimes. Although they rated developing instructional materials (3.12) as a difficulty, they also experience sometimes, several of them talked about the financial pressures they encountered during their Practice Teaching, which were shared in the focus group discussion.

“In my experience, I think, as a teacher, you must be financially capable of providing for your pupils' needs because not all of them have the things that they need in class.”

“There were a lot of expenses, like buying supplies needed in doing instructional materials.”

“I experienced financial difficulties. Since I am still a college student, I do not have enough money to spend on all the instructional materials I need. Because of this, I had lesser money for my transportation and meal expenses.”

Some pre-service teachers referred to the difficulty of developing instructional materials to their capacity to finance their additional needs. The same challenge was also experienced by students as reported by the Union of Students Ireland. In a survey conducted among 3,000 student teachers, 71% of them had to take part-time jobs during their Practice Teaching to pay their expenses for rent, teaching materials, travel, and food [12]. Forty-two percent of them even considered dropping out because of financial pressures [12].

C. Classroom Management

In terms of classroom management, data on Table 3 presents that although they found it less challenging to maintain the cleanliness and orderliness in the classroom (3.0) and handle routine activities (2.91), the pre-service teachers always experienced difficulty in keeping learners' discipline (3.60).

Table 3. Difficulties Experienced by Pre-Service Teachers in Classroom Management

Indicators	M	I
Maintaining cleanliness and orderliness in the classroom	3.0	Sometimes
Handling routine activities	2.91	Sometimes
Maintaining learners' discipline	3.60	Always
Handling learners' misbehaviors	3.66	Always

Among all the indicators in the different areas, they experienced it as most difficult to handle the learners' misbehavior (3.66). Both difficulties were affirmed in their statements in the FGD.

“There were some pupils who did not show respect to me, so I had to be patient with them. My cooperating teacher helped me address this concern by teaching me ways to discipline the pupils.”

“At first, the pupils appeared to be shy. They were quiet and attentive. But as weeks passed, they became naughty, messy, and noisy. They were difficult to control. I had to try different strategies so that they will cooperate.”

Since the pre-service teachers were assigned to teach in the last quarter of the school year, rules and routine activities had been set by the teachers of the classes they handled. The first few weeks of school are spent teaching, practicing, and re-teaching rules and routine activities [13]. It could have helped if the pre-service teachers were oriented to existing rules and procedures implemented in class. However, when faced with challenging situations in disciplining students in the actual field, pre-service teachers see them as opportunities for learning [14].

Ineffective handling of disciplinary problems was the most frequent problem faced by a group of elementary and secondary pre-service teachers in the Philippines [15]. Other issues associated with classroom management they experienced involved the inability to hold students' attention, managing classes independently, and performing routine activities effectively [15].

Students in a teaching diploma program recognized the importance of the course on classroom management. When asked to classify the courses by order of importance, students unanimously determined the course on Classroom Management as the most important course in the program [16].

D. Assessment of Students' Learning

Pre-service teachers sometimes encountered difficulties in assessing students' learning, such as formulating questions (3.18), administering assessment strategies in determining learners' progress (3.21), and keeping assessment records of learners (2.83) as shown in Table 4.

Table 4. Difficulties Experienced by Pre-Service Teachers in Assessment of Students' Learning

Indicators	M	I
Formulating questions relevant to the subject matter	3.18	Sometimes
Administering assessment to determine learners' progress	3.21	Sometimes
Keeping the assessment records of learners	2.83	Sometimes

These results convey that pre-service teachers only experienced difficulties at times. In designing and administering assessments, they are guided by learning outcomes in the basic education curriculum. Secondary pre-service teachers encountered the same experience [10]. Most of them viewed assessing students' learning is not a source of difficulty since they prepared assessment tools based on the predetermined student learning outcomes [10]. However, among a group of elementary and secondary pre-service teachers, choosing appropriate activities in assessing the learners and formulating different types of questions were the two main problems in the assessment that some of them encountered [15].

Another possible reason why pre-service teachers in this study did not encounter many difficulties in assessing their learners' performance could be the two courses on assessment, which they took as part of the teacher education curriculum in the country.

E. Communication Skills

Data on Table 5 reveals that pre-service teachers sometimes encountered difficulties in their communication skills. These indicators were representing ideas simply and clearly (3.12), using appropriate vocabulary (3.04), pronouncing words correctly (2.95), and avoiding mannerisms (2.94).

Table 5. Difficulties Experienced by Pre-Service Teachers in Communication Skills

Indicators	M	I
Using vocabulary appropriate for the learners	3.04	Sometimes
Pronouncing words correctly	2.95	Sometimes
Presenting ideas clearly to the learners	3.12	Sometimes
Avoiding undesirable mannerisms in speech or actions	2.94	Sometimes

The results indicate that regardless of the medium of instruction used in the grade level they were

assigned to, the pre-service teachers did not experience much difficulty in their communication skills. Those who were assigned in the primary grades used the learners' first language as the medium of instruction while those assigned in the intermediate classes used the English language. Since most pre-service teachers have the same first language with the learners, this could have helped them in their vocabulary, pronunciation, and presentation of ideas. The training the pre-service teachers received in their Content and Professional Education courses, where English is used as a medium of instruction even in their demonstration teaching activities, could have contributed to their facility in the use of the language.

Most of the work of a teacher is done by communicating with students [17]. It is inevitable that despite their training, pre-service teachers will still have inadequacies. In a study of one of the universities in the Philippines, some pre-service teachers identified their poor command of the English and Filipino languages as a problem they experienced [15]. They experienced situations when they forgot or did not know what to say in front of the class [15]. Even if they may be comfortable speaking a language, teaching using that language is not the same, which may, in turn, influence their confidence in teaching [10], [16].

F. Personal Competencies

In the area of personal competencies, data on Table 6 shows that pre-service teachers experienced occasional difficulties in observing proper grooming (2.92) and demonstrating confidence, emotional maturity, and tolerance for stress (3.08).

The pre-service teachers had prescribed sets of uniforms, which could have lessened their concerns in grooming and dressing. Cooperating schools also had set dress codes for pre-service teachers on occasions when they may not wear their uniforms. However, a study showed that pre-service teachers' perception of how grooming is related to professional identity might have been influenced more by the class expectations and not dress code or the appearance of faculty members in school [18].

The majority of the pre-service teachers are in the age range of 20 to 25. Most of them have experienced having part-time jobs. Some are married and have children. These could have contributed to their self-confidence, emotional maturity, and tolerance for stress.

To successfully fulfill responsibilities in the new role that pre-service teachers have, they recognized the need to convey their appearance and self-regulate their behaviors [18].

Table 6. Difficulties Experienced by Pre-Service Teachers in Personal Competencies

Indicators	M	I
Observing proper grooming and dressing	2.92	Sometimes
Demonstrating self-confidence, emotional maturity, and tolerance for stress	3.08	Sometimes
Getting along with learners, teachers, administrators, and fellow pre-service teachers	3.0	Sometimes
Showing love and concern for learners	2.94	Sometimes

Data revealed that getting along with learners, school personnel, and fellow pre-service teachers (3.0) and showing love and concern for learners (2.94) were sometimes difficult. Several statements in the focus group discussion explained these further.

“There were stubborn pupils. But once you discover what their interests are and show genuine concern for them, they begin to listen and participate.”

“At first, I found the school principal intimidating. I was afraid to approach him. But after a few days, I realized that he is strict but approachable. He taught me to be responsible.”

“I had a fellow pre-service teacher who had her way of doing things. She did not interact with us. But when the group realized that she was struggling, we decided to approach and help her.”

These statements disclosed that although they experienced difficulties, pre-service teachers dispelled their impressions or misconceptions once they were able to get to know and interact further with learners, school personnel, and fellow pre-service teachers. In a study in the United States, pre-service teachers recognized the importance of being pleasant and friendly [18]. Since pre-service teachers set examples to their students, they need to be respectful, enthusiastic, and well-behaved [18].

G. Occupational Skills

Findings on Table 7 presents the data that elementary education pre-service teachers sometimes experienced difficulties in occupational skills such as demonstrating leadership and a sense of responsibility (3.14), showing creativity and resourcefulness (3.09), demonstrating industry and willingness to serve (3.06), and demonstrating punctuality (3.01).

Table 7. Difficulties Experienced by Pre-Service Teachers in Occupational Skills

Indicators	M	I
Demonstrating leadership and sense of responsibility	3.14	Sometimes
Showing creativity and resourcefulness	3.09	Sometimes
Demonstrating industry and willingness to serve	3.06	Sometimes
Demonstrating punctuality	3.01	Sometimes

These findings show that there were only a few instances when pre-service teachers encountered problems on occupational skills. Generally, teacher education students are given many opportunities in the curriculum to develop such skills. Furthermore, these occupational skills are also reflections of character traits that are influenced by their sense of maturity, work, and life experiences. The socio-economic status of pre-service teachers could be a contributory factor that could have been a hindrance or a driving force in their sense of leadership, industry, responsibility, creativity, resourcefulness, and punctuality.

Factors that Contributed to Practice Teaching Experiences

The following discussion shows the extent that the factors in the pre-practicum, practicum, and post-practicum phases contributed to the Practice Teaching experiences of the elementary education pre-service teachers.

A. Pre-Practicum Phase

In the pre-practicum phase, data shows that among the eight factors, six contributed much in the practice teaching of the pre-service teachers. The demonstration teaching conducted in the Professional Education and Content courses was determined to be the highest contributing factor in the pre-practicum phase (3.72). Demonstration teaching enhances the students thinking and decision making processes since they need to plan, implement, and assess their

teaching [19]. It also aids in the development of the credibility of students as beginning teachers [19].

Table 8. Factors in the Pre-practicum Phase that Contributed to Practice Teaching Experiences

Factors	M	I
Quality of instruction in Professional Education courses	3.52	Much
Quality of instruction in General Education courses	3.60	Much
Quality of instruction in Content courses	3.56	Much
Field Study experiences	3.62	Much
Demonstration teaching opportunities in classes	3.72	Much
Seminars on lesson planning	3.28	Moderate
Pre-deployment demonstration teaching and mentoring	3.60	Much
Orientation provided by the College	3.48	Moderate

The Field Study experiences (3.62), and the quality of instruction in General Education courses (3.60), Professional Education courses (3.52), and Content courses (3.56) were also among the six indicators which the pre-service teachers rated to have contributed much in their Practice Teaching. Similarly, the teaching demonstration and mentoring conducted by the college teachers before the deployment of the pre-service teachers (3.60) was also rated to have contributed much to the Practice Teaching. Pre-service English teachers also acknowledged that micro-teaching before practicum gave them opportunities to practice in front of their peers and listen to feedback [16].

The orientation provided by the college (3.48) was rated to have contributed moderately to their Practice Teaching experiences. Although seminars on lesson planning, methods, and strategies (3.07) were assessed to have moderately contributed to Practice Teaching, this was observed to be the least factor contributing to all the factors in the three phases. Despite the seminars on lesson planning facilitated by assigned college teachers, a seminar-workshop focusing on how lessons are prepared in the public schools was not able to push through due to the resource person's unavailability. This seminar-workshop could have helped the pre-service teachers become more familiar with the new lesson plan used in their cooperating schools, a difficulty they have experienced in their Practice Teaching.

B. Practicum Phase

Like the pre-practicum phase, most of the factors in the practicum phase were identified by the pre-service teachers to have contributed much to their Practice Teaching. The highest rating among the factors in all phases was given to actual classroom teaching (3.85). Since the pre-service teachers determined that the demonstration teaching opportunities in the pre-practicum phase contributed much to their practice teaching, it is implied that actual teaching experiences during the practicum phase would also add much to their experiences. A study conducted by Ulla revealed that demonstration teaching in college classes and actual classroom teaching helped enhance the pre-service teachers' skills and confidence[20].

Table 9. Factors in the Practicum Phase that Contributed to Practice Teaching Experiences

Factors	M	I
Orientation provided by the cooperating school	3.61	Much
Actual classroom teaching	3.85	Much
Post-demonstration teaching conference with the cooperating teacher	3.52	Much
Mentoring of cooperating teachers	3.67	Much
Mentoring of college teachers	3.52	Much
Supervisory visits of Practice Teaching Coordinator	3.46	Moderate
Supervision of the School Principal	3.50	Moderate
Supervision of the College Dean	3.47	Moderate
Support of fellow pre-service teachers	3.84	Much

Closely following actual teaching as a contributory factor was the support given by fellow pre-service teachers (3.84). This finding was validated by the statements of pre-service teachers in the group discussion.

“My fellow pre-service teachers and I were able to build good teamwork. We were able to surpass the hardships we experienced.”

“We helped each other in doing the tasks. We listen to one another, especially when there are things that we cannot understand. We would even meet during lunch break.”

“We talked about our experiences in the classroom. We shared ideas like what method is more appropriate to use in teaching a lesson. We also talked about how to address classroom

problems like handling pupils who are noisy or inattentive.”

Findings in a study of pre-service teachers assigned in a rural community revealed that the encouragement they received and teaching ideas they gained in collaborating enhanced their self-confidence [14]. Listening to lessons and asking opinions from fellow pre-service teachers were common experiences noted in a study conducted among elementary education pre-service Science teachers [9]. These collaborative conversations shift individualistic thinking to collaborative thinking and behavior when pre-service teachers turn to their peers to validate their ideas and tentative solutions to the problems they encounter [14].

Other factors that were considered to have contributed much were the orientation provided by the cooperating school (3.61), post-demonstrating teaching conference with cooperating teachers (3.52), mentoring of cooperating teachers (3.67), and mentoring of college teachers (3.52). These findings stress the essential roles that mentors play in the actual Practice Teaching phase. Cooperating teachers have a significant impact on a student teacher's experience [21]. The relationship between the cooperating teacher and the pre-service teacher is a significant factor in determining the quality of the internship [22]. This relationship should have a balance that meets both persons' needs through open dialogue and realistic expectations [22]. Some pre-service teachers shared in the FGD their experiences with their cooperating teachers.

“My cooperating teacher was very approachable and considerate. She encouraged me always to do my best. She guided me every day in making lesson plans and teaching the students.”

“I learned so many things from my cooperating teacher, not just about teaching but also how to relate well with others.”

“My cooperating motivated me to believe that I can do everything. She told me to be true to myself. She inspired me, and I learned a lot from her.”

Although most of the pre-service teachers shared that they had good relationships with their cooperating

teachers, some encountered difficulties in dealing with them, one of them shared the following during the focus group discussion:

“My cooperating teacher seldom talks to me. She only speaks to me when I ask a question. I felt that she did not like me.”

A study conducted stressed the need for pre-service teachers to recognize that they are new among well-experienced educators; thus, they must learn to deal with awkward, unfamiliar situations with their teaching colleagues [21].

The remaining three factors were rated to have contributed moderately to the practice teaching, such as supervision from the school principal (3.50), College Dean (3.47), and Practice Teaching coordinator (3.46). In the focus group discussion, some pre-service teachers explained the supervision provided by the Practice Teaching coordinator.

“The Practice Teaching coordinator guided me and motivated me to go on despite the difficulties I encountered.”

“I am lucky to have a kind and understanding Practice Teaching coordinator. She cannot always visit us in the schools we were assigned because she had a lot of students to supervise. But I would contact her through her mobile phone, and she would take time to give me advice and help me with my problems.”

These statements affirm that the Practice Teaching coordinator or supervisor's vital role is to provide support by bridging the gap between the pre-service teacher's expectations and the realities of the classroom [21]. The moderate rating given by the pre-service teachers could be explained by the less interaction they had with the school principal, College Dean, and Practice Teaching coordinator. It is the cooperating teacher who is directly mentoring a pre-service teacher in this phase.

C. Post-practicum Phase

In the post-practicum phase, the exit conference with the cooperating teachers and principal (3.54) was observed to have contributed much, as presented in Table 10.

Table 10. Factors in the Post-practicum Phase that Contributed to Practice Teaching Experiences

Factors	M	I
Post-practicum Phase		
Exit conference with the cooperating teachers and principal	3.54	Much
Exit conference with the Practice Teaching Coordinator	3.44	Moderate

“I had a good relationship with my cooperating teacher. After I have taught the lesson, she gave me pieces of advice on how I can improve my lesson plan and what could be other ways to improve my way of teaching.”

On the other hand, the exit conference with the Practice Teaching coordinator was considered by the pre-service teachers to have moderately contributed to their experiences (3.44). A reason could be a large number of pre-service teachers under the supervision of the Practice Teaching coordinator. It was challenging for her to observe all pre-service teachers in their actual teaching and to conduct individual or group exit conferences. In the same manner, the suspension of classes due to the COVID-19 pandemic hindered a meeting planned by the Practice Teaching coordinator with the pre-service teachers after the completion of their practice teaching.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The study's findings revealed that pre-service teachers always encountered difficulties in planning activities relevant to the lesson, choosing methods suited to the learners and subject matter, and using varied teaching strategies. All of which are part of the planning and implementation of the lessons in class. Crucial also to the teaching-learning process is classroom management, in which pre-service teachers always encountered difficulties. Indicators such as maintaining learners' discipline and handling their misbehavior were elements that positively or negatively affect their success as teachers in class.

Different factors contributed to the Practice Teaching experiences of pre-service teachers in the three phases of practicum. The demonstration teaching opportunities in college classes had the most significant contribution during the pre-practicum phase. Similarly, the actual classroom teaching and the exit conference with the cooperating teacher and principal were the highest contributory factors in the practicum and post-practicum phases.

Based on the results of this study, input from the pre-service teachers can be used to enhance the Practice Teaching program's implementation. These include the following:

First, seminar-workshops before the pre-service teachers' deployment to their cooperating schools can be conducted to address some of the difficulties during the practicum phase. A seminar-workshop on lesson planning facilitated by a resource person from the public school sector can be conducted. Seminars on classroom management, teaching strategies, and the like can also be conducted to answer pre-service teachers' needs to become updated with changes in the teaching-learning process. Some topics might have been discussed already a few years ago in their Professional Education and Content courses.

Second, additional Practice Teaching coordinators proportionate to the number of pre-service teachers may be designated by the college. Having additional coordinators will enable better supervision and mentoring of the pre-service teachers. A coordinator's task involves monitoring during the practicum phase and includes other functions during the pre and post practicum phases.

Third, demonstration teaching in Professional Education and Content courses can be further strengthened as pre-service teachers recognize their essential contribution to their Practice Teaching.

Lastly, the mentoring program of the college before the actual Practice Teaching could be more organized as pre-service teachers already saw the benefits they have derived from the program. Mentoring could be conducted in the early part of the first semester, with more college teachers committing as mentors to the pre-service teachers.

This study, however, has several limitations. The survey questionnaires used could include more indicators in each area of difficulty to have more grounds on the extent of problems experienced. Although the study has a complete enumeration of all elementary education pre-service teachers, the findings may not be generalized in the case of secondary education pre-service teachers and those from other colleges and universities.

Similar studies could be conducted for the next groups of pre-service teachers in the succeeding school years to determine if improvements were made in the Practice Teaching program and the effectiveness of the new Philippine teacher education curriculum in preparing students for the teaching profession.

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