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Exploring the Uncertainties: The Experiences of Pre-Service Teachers in the New Normal Education

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Abstract

The new normal of education gives the future teachers to experience new adaptation of the learning environment in their practicum. The qualitative method was used to find out that their experiences during the practicum includes hardships in teaching, unprepared but they could adapt to the new technologies and maximize their potentials. The factors that affect their teaching practicum of the student teachers are: time management, financial problems, internet connectivity and anxiety and pressure. Results showed that they give their best just to be able to demonstrate the processes in student practicum. It is recommended that their experiences would serve as an encouragement for further research and discuss alternative ways in redesigning programs for teacher preparation through learning opportunities, mentoring and collaboration.

Keywords: pre-service teachers, new normal education, practice teaching

Introduction

Practice Teaching to pre-service teachers plays a big role in preparing and evaluating their level of learning in the actual field of teaching. This is an avenue to apply theories of learning, learn teaching approaches, and profess their knowledge and passion from more than three years of studying.

This completion of the program requirements of the pre-service without experiential learning is very challenging. COVID 19 gave rise to various challenges of pre-service teachers. Asynchronous and synchronous teaching-learning provides the learners a continuation of their disruptive education. Delving into the online world, the internet plays a very crucial role in the new normal of education. Pre-service teachers started their careers without classroom observation or experiences in classroom settings with pupils or students. This is one of the problems faced by pre-service education as this was not anticipated. They were prepared for a face-to-face setup of teaching and then thrown into facing the lenses of technology or having their classmates as their pupils or students.

Most educational institutions, shift to online teaching and learning, and this made the pre-service teachers worry about their teaching placement or assignment which they must fulfill based on the given duration to complete teacher education. Teaching practicum is considered an important stage in training teachers as both theory and practice are combined to provide opportunities for practicum teachers to enhance their learning, in addition to being an essential component to prepare them to become effective teachers (Darling-Hammond, 2017). The education program provides various ways to come out with the new ways of practicum teaching to fit into the requirements of teaching and learning made by the higher education to make sure that pre-service teachers are ready for their teaching journey since face-to-face practicum is no longer available in this pandemic era.

The pandemic has caused the teaching practicum a new adaptation to the learning environment in the institution. This new dimension of adapting the experiences of pre-service teachers during their practicum is confronted with challenges and roadblocks in their teaching program. The new norm is to face the classmates as their pupils or students during their assigned demonstration. They had not experienced the culminating activities in the classroom setting, since practicum hours are required, their experiences are being

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compromised. They may not fulfill classroom pre-requisites, instead, they learn the hardships of teaching through narrating their experiences, as part of their identity in the completion of the requirements.

As this is the problem faced by the pre-service students, their experiences of teaching in the new normal are documented through narrating their experiences. This study explores the uncertainties of pre-service students during their practicum program. It aimed to describe the experiences of student teachers in conducting practicum in the new normal of education. It also highlights the factors affecting the academic experiences of Education pre-service teachers of Catanduanes State University-Panganiban Campus

Materials and Methods

This study employed a qualitative research design using focus-group discussions, interviews and field notes. The informants were the 15 pre-service Bachelor of Elementary Education teachers and 5 Bachelor of Technical Vocational Teacher Education pre-service teachers who underwent their student teaching practicum AY 2021-2022. The FGD, was initially conducted among ten participants. The researcher served as a moderator, allowing the discussants to freely share their ideas, comments and sentiments. Each was able to respond to each other and build upon each other's ideas and comments. This qualitative approach enabled the researcher to develop a level of detail from being highly involved in the actual experiences (Creswel, 2014).

The interviews were conducted with 5 BTVTED student teachers to gather the needed data. This allowed free and conversational communication. These faculty members being interviewed for the study are coded. Further, the FGD were audiotaped and the audio recordings were transcribed verbatim to get the textual data. The transcribed information or data were coded according to the responses from the discussants. Then the codes were categorized and thematically analyzed. Thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns (themes) within data by looking for similarities, differences, relationships, central patterns, and theoretical and analytical constructs (Braun & Clark, 2006).

The informants explained their experiences, in focus group discussions and other in an interview.

Results and Discussion

A. The Experiences of Pre-Service Students in the New Normal of Education

Pre-Service teachers are being prepared to support student learning. Their practicum provides an actual experience of teaching in the field. But due to covid 19 pandemic, pre-service teachers had experienced the new normal of education, making all the shifts on how practicumers will do the actual teaching modality and prepare to support student learning.

The experiences narrated by the informants in their new normal student teaching centered on the following: the hardship of student teaching in this pandemic, the feeling of dissatisfaction, adapting to technologies, and maximizing their abilities potentials of demonstration teaching in the new normal.

The hardship of teaching. Practice teaching is an element of the teacher education program because it provides the

pre-service the first-hand experiences. This is the training ground for the student teachers to receive before they exit the school. To meet the 21st-century they should develop an interest to the teacher education program. This teacher education is related to how they thought and how they learned in pre-service programs to which the quality of teaching in schools depends on the quality of training student teachers.

With the effect of the pandemic on their courses, and putting them in a new environment with no face-to-face classes, pre-service teachers resort to studying or struggling at their own pace of learning. These pre-service teachers feel hard in their teaching experiences as this is the first time that they have no classroom interaction with the real students and do not know how to execute the lessons. The informant described that they have insufficient knowledge of demonstration teaching. They lack motivation on how to start the lesson enthusiastically. They too had limited teacher training personally and professionally. With the hardship experienced, some struggled and panicked.

Moreover, these experiences do not really affect their practice teaching, instead they become responsible and give them strength to learn more in this new normal of practice teaching.

The following transcript qualify on the hardship that student teacher experienced:

"teaching is really tough,...as a first timer and without any experience and social interaction with the real students..., its hard how to make our teaching more enthusiastic and livelier" (S1).

"It becomes harder. We are the first batch who experienced and suffered most. No actual observation, no interaction towards teachers and students. We are very sad because we can't experience the feeling in teaching the pupils designated to us." (S3)

"There are times that I am struggling with the fact that it is a very new experience to me. Especially the demo teaching." (S7)

"I had experienced of mental breakdown and exhaustion. During my teaching demo, I encountered hardships and many difficulties like: finishing my lesson plan within the allotted time, - I honestly had a hard time constructing my lesson plan as well as instructional materials." (S6)

"I find it a little bit hard. Since there are parts in the lesson which you need to be included, wherein in some points, you are dealing with mental breakdown and getting panic". (S10)

"The hardship is in lesson planning because we had limited set-up dealing with our professors, anyway okay naman to kaysa wala kaming practicum. (S11)

"As a first-timer, you have to become well prepared in terms of the lesson you are going to discuss including the materials that you will use, how to adapt in an new environment and be more responsible. It is not a problem not a hindrance for me, it becomes my strength to have a meaningful experience in teaching." (S2)

"However, all those challenging times, made me more likely to study and learn more." (S10)

Being Unprepared for teaching

With the heights of the pandemic in 2020, flexible learning was used in different universities and colleges. Pre-service teachers are being prepared to support student learning, but the sudden change of learning environment in the new

normal has been the reason why students are unprepared in their teaching activities. This is the first time that the pre-service teachers will start their career without experiencing classroom setting with students. The closure of schools for students minimizes the lesson demonstrations, presentation skills and even interaction with students. Lesson planning and even developing instructional materials were not mastered by the student teachers. These made them being unprepared for teaching.

From the responses revealed, there is a feeling of guilt, lack of confidence, and dissatisfaction if you are not prepared for the demonstration teaching. It is an embarrassment teaching in front of the students (peers) and mentors if you cannot execute the lessons. The academic resiliency of the student to adapt to these difficulties encountered is seen as a learning success of the students.

The following are the responses made by the students regarding their preparedness as a teacher in this new normal.

"For the 3 consecutive demos. I am honestly not well prepared especially in making my lesson plan because I have some responsibilities in our house. Being not prepared is a feeling that I am not satisfied with what could be the result of my teaching performance and it lowers my confidence to speak up in front of the panels and my co-practice teachers" (S1)

"Perhaps it also embarrassing, it puts me to shame because many people will judge you because your work is unsatisfiable. In that phase I learned my lesson." (S2)

"A feeling of guilt, because I feel that I don't give my 100% preparedness especially to my instructional materials. "saka na ako magibo pag madari na magdemo". (S3)

"I was a little bit disappointed with my first demo because I was not able to prepare my lesson plan well" (S4)

"Lack of confidence in front of my evaluators. Honestly in my 3rd demo, I am not well prepared, including the visual aids." (S8)

"It is hard to accept the unsatisfiable result which was sadly become the reason to lower my confidence." (S9)

Technology adaptation

As seen on the threat of the virus, students and teachers were able to adapt on the use of technology to gain access on what has been missed. Through adapting in the use of technology, it enables collaboration and communication between mentor teacher and pre-service teachers. As the informant stated, it helps them in the execution of the lesson easy and motivated the learner to participate in the lesson.

"I can work at ease and efficiently. It must be use wisely and responsibly." (S2)

"Really help me execute my lessons well. I used technologies in getting the attention of the learners especially in motivational part." (S4)

"Technology gives a very essential role in teaching aside from making the lesson easy, it also capture student interest, attention and focus" (S10)

"Adapting to technologies make teaching and learning advance to cope with change environment." (S8)

"I believe that these technologies will become our best assets to effectively execute our lessons and at the same time to provide a quality of education that every learner deserved." (S6)

Maximizing Teaching Potentials

The new normal of education pose a challenge to every student for they made to maximize their experiences and abilities in the new normal. Informants opted to give what is best for them since this the first time that they have no face-to-face interaction with students. This can be seen their resourcefulness as a pre-service teacher.

The following are the responses in maximizing their potentials.

"As a practicum, I learned and need to maximize my teaching skills even more such as be more resourceful, well prepared, creative, have a good command of voice and think what is the best way to manage the behavior of the students or established an effective classroom routines and rules." (S1)

"We use you tube, google, and giving the best for myself" (S12)

"This new set up, new norm of student practicum suggestion from mentors and supervisor is really important. Through google, youtube as an additional information gives a significant learning that I need to possess. After undergone demo, I realized that I have a lot of qualities need to work even more such as be well prepared, resourceful and creative" (S8)

"Really starts from my mentors and evaluators. Their comments and suggestions boost me to overcome my weaknesses to have a successful outcome." (S2)

"Experiencing this kind of demonstration taught me a lot especially with the feedback comments of the panel and mentor, The weaknesses that I have should maintain and grow even more to become an effective individual, teacher to be exact." (S4)

B. Factors Affecting the Pre-Service in the new normal of Practicum

As interviewed from the student, they are mostly affected by the changing curriculum: the K-12 and the pandemic. As they are the first batch who have not undergone practicum, they are confronted with the challenging and enormous task in their internship program, still they were able to cope up to the requirement needed for the practicum hours.

Informants were able to identify factors that affect their practicum: time management, financial problems, internet connectivity, anxiety/pressure and nervousness/shyness.

Time management.

As practice teaching is the most crucial part of graduating students, they have to manage their time well. As stated by the informants, it took time for them to adjust and manage the time schedule because they are at home for almost two years. With the demand of practice teaching, they are cramming managing time on lesson planning and even making visual aids.

The following were stated:

"Time management also means a lot to the learning of both students and teachers, however, it is also hard for me, to do the demo within the given time." (S9)

"I encountered hardships and many difficulties like: finishing my lesson plan within the allotted time, - I honestly had a hard time constructing my lesson plan as well as instructional materials." (S6)

Financial problems.

Students often struggle to afford their requirements in the school. There is difficulty in financing the materials needed

in their practice teaching.

"I find it a little hard where to get money for the print outs, for visual aids etc." (S13, S14)

"Even for buying load for internet connectivity is a problem", (S12)

"I am alone, my parents are from me. They are in Leyte." (S2)

"I need load, because going to the place where there is signal is a burden for me, I uranan, I namokan ako don", (S5)

Internet Connectivity.

Internet is now the bloodline in the new normal of education for it provides the needed information by anyone. Queries, clarifications, announcement and others are sent through internet. It is the way for the learner to continue studies in the normal. However, internet connection is the greatest factor affecting the students. Students have to go uphill or go to places with internet signal just to be able to see "Mr. Google" for the requirements.

"I can do my activities through the internet but, it is slow" (S15)

"It's a problem" (S11)

"We just wait to have signal" (S,10,11)

Anxiety/Pressure.

Students experience problems during their studies, and feel anxious when taking exams or making significant life decisions. They have the feeling of negatively judged and evaluated, the feeling that their demonstration teaching is poor, embarrassment, inferiority, humiliation which leads to avoidance from people. This becomes major concern when they realize that they will have to give oral demonstration while using technologies.

Sometimes students were being pressured also by the parents if they are really doing their lessons, not knowing it is also the responsibility of the parents to monitor their children.

"I had experienced of mental breakdown and exhaustion." (S6)

"Nervousness is also affecting my teaching demonstration causing me to forget the flow of my lesson plan." (S4)

"I am struggling with the fact that it is a very new experience to me." (S7)

"there are some points sadly you deal with mental breakdown and get panic "

"People around me – judging, gossiping and talking behind me. Gives me anxiety and pressure". (S2)

"Fear of being judged by the way I talk and act" (S10)

The student Internship Program is very important for it prepares future teachers the culture of teaching and learning. This offers various experiences where different pedagogical approach are applied. During their Field Study 1, their demo teaching was online. The field study 2 was a face-to-face demonstration with the classmates as students. This is a challenge for the pre-service teachers for this the first time to experience this kind of activity. This allows them to explore learning activities since this is new to all educators as well as future educators. Hill (2021) pointed out that teaching preparation programs assist candidates with the pedagogical, theoretical, and practical application of teaching and learning. This drives their effort to learn more and exert efforts in the conduct of teaching practicum as they consider them hard. Their workability was just

around the campus wherein their experiences was inefficient in the development of a future teacher. As Farzaana Abdul Kadir & Azlina Abdul Aziz (2021) claimed that prospective teachers were deprived of the 'normal' field experience and actual classroom teaching practices in authentic school settings. Various practicum modalities were all over the world and these are documented in many studies published during 2020 and early 2021. Picollo, Livers & Tipton (2021) findings from analysis of student teacher and student teaching coordinators described both beneficial and disappointing preparation experiences as they explore the ever-changing educational environment of student teaching during covid.

Lei and Medwell (2021), revealed that online collaborative teacher training would offer student teachers an opportunity to collaborate, discuss and reflect on their professional development as teachers which would also encourage teacher educators to reconsider how new forms of practice and teaching theories can be woven more effectively in post covid. On the other hand, Marcum et.al (2021) examines how a student teacher, mentor teacher and a supervisor which suggest that there were gains and losses in terms of pre-service teachers' ability to develop essential skills; classroom management skills suffered, while the delivery of the innovative lesson, formative assessments were enhanced.

In addition, the adaptability to the technology helps them in the execution of their lessons, especially in the changing environment which maximizes their quality teaching to their students. Moreover, Marcum (2021) in this transition period, student teachers' skills were valued in order to reach students a variety of environments.

However, the experiences brought by this pandemic in the new normal of education, made them identify the factors that greatly affect their being a practicum student, and strive hard and be motivated to learn more.

Conclusion

Based on the findings, the students experienced hardship resorting to studying or struggling at their own pace of learning. They felt unprepared to the new normal of education but they need to adapt to the new technologies as this helps them execute lessons and maximize their potential.

Deprived of the field experience and actual classroom teaching practices, it is still best to have a practicum in a formal setting where learning is still best evaluated and pressure/anxiety can be minimized if parents and teachers have monthly communication and at the same time conduct mental health awareness

Teacher educators should pay attention to the experiences explored so that they would address these uncertainties and redesign programs for teacher preparation. This program would include educator learning opportunities to match current needs, mentoring new teacher's roles and collaborating with partners in the community.

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