Difficulties Encountered by Pre-service Teachers: Basis of a Pre-service Training Program

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Abstract Pre-service teachers are of great importance today as they will become the next teachers to hone, mold, and instill the minds, hearts and skills of the children for greater use. It is very crucial to help these pre-service teachers by knowing their difficulties and how we are going to be of help. This study aimed to determine and discuss the extent of difficulties encountered by the pre-service teachers in one state college in Northern Philippines. Furthermore, this also determined the degree of acceptability of the identified probable strategies that can be applied to address such difficulties. This study utilized an explanatory sequential mixed methods research design. Using an explanatory sequential design involves the two-phased process – collecting and analyzing quantitative data first followed by collecting qualitative data to expound the quantitative findings. The data from the questionnaire and interviews were gathered from 79 graduating pre-service teachers. The findings reveal that the pre-service teachers encounter slight difficulties in the seven support areas; administrative support, cooperating teachers, student supervisors, peers, students, related tasks, and learning environment. The findings also showed that problems encountered by pre-service teachers vary from each field of specialization. Further, the findings show that the identified strategies are moderately acceptable to be used to address the difficulties of pre-service teachers. As highlighted from the interview; individual differences among students, supervisors, and peers, lack of facilities, and lack of preparation and training are some of the key reasons affecting the difficulties encountered by

pre-service teachers.

Keywords Difficulties, Pre-service Teachers, Cooperating Teachers, Training Program

1. Introduction

Quality pre-service teacher education is a key factor in quality education. In the Philippines, the pre-service preparation of teachers for the primary and secondary education sectors is a very important function and responsibility that has been assigned to Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). All efforts to improve the quality of education in the Philippines are dependent on the service of teachers who are properly prepared to undertake the various important roles and functions of teachers. As such, it is of utmost importance that the highest standards are set in defining the objectives, components and processes of the pre-service teacher education curriculum [1].

Despite the education situation in the Philippines as reflected in different reports, studies and professional articles, it cannot be denied that quality of education plays a vital role in the realization of the country's aspiration relative to ASEAN Integration and global competitiveness. Global competitiveness and quality of education are seen as inextricable elements of success; hence, the latter concept has to be attained for the realization of the former. Congruent to both of the preceding is the need to increase

the level of instruction in the Philippines not only to comply with Article II, Section 17 and Article XIV of the Philippine Constitution but also to make this nation a better haven for learning.

ASEAN Integration calls for a very competitive quality of education, hence, every academic institution in the country will have to improve its systems and procedures relative to the provision of quality instruction. Looking at the global and regional scenario, it cannot be argued that the Philippines despite becoming an educational haven is still one of the lowest-performing nations when it comes to education. Obviously one of the factors contributing to a low quality of education in the Philippines is the fact that some (if not most) of the educators have not undergone appropriate training during the pre-service teaching. All higher education institution through their Teacher Education Program recognizes the significance of pre-service teaching. In one state college in the Philippines, student teaching is the culmination of the professional education. This experience is provided in the education course of the last year of pre-service education that serves as the transitional phase between the past role of full-time students and as a future role of a full-time teacher. During this period, the students will be playing a dual role at the same time – that of a teacher and student in the cooperating school for which they are assigned. This is to prepare the cream of the crops who will be thoroughly prepared for the tedious and academically challenging demands of the teaching world. As [2] reiterated, “field experiences are a foundation in pre-service teacher education program today”.

One of the factors in attracting students to enroll in a particular institution is the value of training it offers to the student. Student training contributes to the quality of their learning experience and their academic success. Studies show that the most important factors in education quality assurance are quality of teaching/learning and services systems, support for students [3], instructional activities [4], and pedagogical practices [5].

In Higher Educational Institutions (HEIs), one of the service areas that were always being evaluated by external accrediting agencies such as the Association of Accrediting Chartered Colleges and Universities in the Philippines (AACCUP), Philippine Association of State Universities and Colleges (PASUC), Commission on Higher Education (CHED), and others are student services. Through these monitoring and evaluations, the institution keeps on striving in meeting the recommendations of the said different accrediting agencies. However, to further assess student services, the students being the beneficiary and most affected of these services must also be involved in determining proper pre-service training programs which are solutions to the difficulties encountered during pre-service teaching. Thus, this will solicit information from students that can help HEIs better assess the quality of its institutional service areas such as student services.

1.1. Difficulties of Pre-service Teachers

Teaching Profession is the noblest profession especially teaching at schools considered to be a more important one. The school teaching lays a strong foundation for the saplings to grow up for their future. New trends in education had brought challenges for the educational sectors to align the curriculum to the national agenda as well as to the dictates of the local and global community. Some of the current development in education includes technology integration as a requirement in the K to 12 Curriculum, General Education Curriculum, and Outcomes-Based Education.

Technology integration in the curriculum and instruction will require future teachers to conduct alternative learning delivery systems or have their lessons through learning management systems. In line with these new developments are varied learning styles, values, and attitudes of the 21st century students. Investigating the difficulties of pre-service teachers as a result of these new developments in education will provide early professional steps that are to be conducted.

A review of literature reveals that some of these challenges are difficulties that include tensions, varied experiences, opinions, beliefs and conceptions of teaching and learning, basic understanding of the secondary school culture and context for teaching and learning, interaction with students, awareness of teaching skills and techniques, reflective thinking during the initial stages of the pre-service academic program, and practical teaching resources [2], [4], [6] – [8]. Moreover, [4] stressed the need to learn how to use technology effectively and efficiently because he found that technology integration is the problem encountered by the pre-service teachers before and during lesson activities.

Another review of the literature showed that dominant problems of pre-service teachers are on the learning environment, cooperating teachers, peers, students, assigned tasks [8], [9], lack of school engagement [5], language barrier [10], and resources [7]. Such difficulties in various aspects of field observation may block the enhancement of field experiences like practicum. Additionally, [10] and [11] opined that with the pressures experienced by the pre-service teachers, mentoring helps the pre-service teachers overcome the difficulties they experienced. Mentor support as she stressed boosts the confidence of pre-service teachers and reduces professional isolation. Moreover, students' services are of great importance in contributing to the students' growth and development [12].

Moreover, in one of the state colleges in the Philippines, it is observed that pre-service teachers had difficulties in lesson planning, classroom management and the use of technology in their demonstration teaching. The pre-service teachers explained that they experienced difficulty in lesson planning as they lack knowledge in doing so because they are reluctant during the times when

lesson planning was being discussed by their teachers. Some also argued that they are required by their cooperating teachers to develop daily lesson log in their lesson preparation but this daily lesson log was not discussed by their teachers or they were absent during that time. Also, they felt belittled in terms of classroom management. Accordingly, their students behave well when their teacher is inside their classroom but when their teacher is out, their students misbehave and they do not know what to do. Moreover, the pre-service teachers also discussed during the interview that some of them have difficulty incorporating technology in their demonstration teaching but they are thankful that some of their peers including their cooperating teachers helped them with the use of technology.

On the other hand, teacher training programs are important for molding pre-service teachers. This should strongly inculcate mentoring and support program in the pre-service teacher training. This mentoring program assists pre-service teachers in planning and preparing lessons, guiding what to observe, encouraging and showing respect to pre-service teachers [4], [8], [10] – [12]. This guides and provides authentic experiences the pre-service teachers may encounter in their future endeavors [13]. Aside from that, microteaching is also seen as an important tool for reflection in pre-service training. This microteaching has the attributes to accommodate the development and enhancement of effective and reflective teachers [14]; hence, it helps the pre-service teachers hone their skills in teaching.

In addition, teachers of the present generation are good at their subject competency but failed on their part of delivery. A teacher spends most of his/her time in the part of delivering the contents. There is a need for appropriate training that would lead to increasing the pre-service teachers' level of knowledge and skills towards giving solutions to the difficulties encountered during the pre-service teaching.

Thus, this study offers the views of pre-service teachers during their practicum. This study aimed to determine the difficulties encountered by the pre-service teachers on administrative support, on cooperating schools, on student supervisors, on students, co-pre-service teachers, on assigned tasks, and on learning environment. Further, to determine the degree of acceptability of the probable strategies that can be used to address these difficulties. The result of the study will be a basis for crafting a proposed pre-service training program.

1.2. Statement of the Problem

This study aimed to determine the difficulties encountered by the pre-service teachers on the indicated items related to the seven support areas (administrative support, cooperating schools, student supervisors, students, co-pre-service teachers, assigned tasks, and learning environment), and the degree of acceptability of the

probable strategies that can be used to address these difficulties. Result of the study will be a basis for crafting a proposed pre-service training program.

This study answered the following questions:

1. What is the extent of difficulties of pre-service teachers in the seven support areas?
2. What is the degree of acceptability of the probable strategies that can be used to address these difficulties?

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. Research Design

This study utilized an explanatory sequential mixed methods research design. Using an explanatory sequential design involves a two-phased process – collecting and analyzing quantitative data first followed by collecting qualitative data to expound the quantitative findings [15]. The underlying purpose of this design is to collect data that will give a general picture of the research problems which are supported by qualitative data in order to refine, extend, or explain the general picture. The respondents were 79 graduating pre-service teachers enrolled for the School Year 2018-2019 comprising of 5 groups majoring in English (15), Mathematics (15), Science (9), Social Sciences (16), and Elementary Education (24).

2.2. Instruments and Data Analysis

For the quantitative phase, a questionnaire by [8] with modifications having a reliability coefficient of 0.86 was used as an instrument to obtain data from difficulties of pre-service teachers. The tool includes 52 indicators reflecting seven critical support areas such as administrative support, cooperating schools, student supervisors, students, co-pre-service teachers, assigned tasks, and learning environment. A research-constructed questionnaire was used to collect data on the degree of acceptability of the determined probable strategies that can be used to address these difficulties met by pre-service teachers. Cronbach's alpha was used to determine the reliability of the said questionnaire. The coefficient value obtained was 0.944, which is interpreted as high reliability, implying that the instrument has consistency.

For the qualitative phase, the pre-service teachers were interviewed. A semi-structured interview guide serves as a prime data collection source. To focus the students on their sharing, they were informed of the results of the survey – quantitative results. Their sharing revolved around the questions “What are the difficulties that you had encountered during the pre-service teaching? What recommendations can you give to address such difficulties? Interviews are open-ended where participants were the ones to determine the flow of information, although when

needed, the interviewer opts to ask questions for clarifications as well as additional information. To ensure validity and truthfulness and trustworthiness of information, results were presented to the respondents to validate such analysis.

Upon the approval to conduct the study, the researcher distributed the questionnaire to the pre-service teachers. The rating scale of; 1-Not a Difficulty, 2-Slightly Difficulty, 3-Moderate Difficulty, 4-Great Difficulty was the basis of the responses of the respondents on determining the extent of difficulties encountered on the 52 indicators reflecting seven critical support areas such as administrative support, cooperating schools, student supervisors, students, co-pre-service teachers, assigned tasks, and learning environment. The rating scale of; 1-Not Acceptable, 2-Slightly Acceptable, 3-Moderate Acceptable, 4-Very Much Acceptable was the basis of the responses of the respondents on the degree of acceptability of the determined probable strategies that can be used to address these difficulties met by pre-service teachers.

problems. Based on descriptive analysis, a qualitative in-depth analysis was done to generate more contextual data and further probe key issues that had emerged from the quantitative data [16].

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Difficulties of Pre-service Teachers

Table 1 presents the extent of difficulties of the pre-service teachers related to the seven critical support areas. Generally, the pre-service teachers encountered *slight difficulties* in the seven support areas as indicated by a grand mean of 2.00. It implies that the pre-service teachers have the necessary knowledge and skills needed in pre-service teaching. However, they encounter difficulties in some indicators on the seven support areas. It can be seen from the table that, pre-service teachers find greater difficulties in the top three areas; students, related tasks, and peers.

Quantitative data was utilized to address the specific

Table 1. Difficulties of Pre-service Teachers Related to the Seven Support Areas

Support Area Descriptive	BEED (24)	English (15)	Math (15)	Science (9)	Social Studies (16)	Overall Mean (79)
<i>On Administrative Support</i>						
Mean	1.56	2.33	2.12	2.44	2.00	2.00 (SD)
Stan. Dev.	0.47	0.54	0.59	0.79	0.71	0.67
<i>On Cooperating Teachers</i>						
Mean	1.51	2.38	1.84	2.30	1.91	1.91 (SD)
Stan. Dev.	0.31	0.41	0.56	0.28	0.53	0.54
<i>Student Supervisors</i>						
Mean	1.57	2.33	2.04	2.07	1.83	1.91 (SD)
Stan. Dev.	0.37	0.28	0.45	0.36	0.44	0.47
<i>Students</i>						
Mean	1.82	2.54	2.35	2.35	2.12	2.18 (SD)
Stan. Dev.	0.61	0.47	0.50	0.54	0.50	0.59
<i>Peers</i>						
Mean	1.60	2.24	1.99	2.33	2.31	2.02 (SD)
Stan. Dev.	0.49	0.79	0.88	0.83	0.92	0.81
<i>Related Tasks</i>						
Mean	1.72	2.41	2.05	2.38	2.05	2.05 (SD)
Stan. Dev.	0.48	0.35	0.68	0.52	0.72	0.61
<i>Learning Environment</i>						
Mean	1.44	2.29	1.99	2.19	2.09	1.92 (SD)
Stan. Dev.	0.37	0.70	0.55	0.48	0.83	0.67
Grand Mean	1.60	2.36	2.05	2.30	2.04	2.00
	(ND)	(SD)	(SD)	(SD)	(SD)	(SD)

Note: BEED (Bachelor of Elementary Education), English, Math (Mathematics), Science, SS (Social Studies)

Interpretation: 1.00-1.75 – (ND or No Difficulty); 1.76-2.5 – (SD or Slight Difficulty); 2.51-3.25 – (MoD or Moderate Difficulty); 3.26-4.00 – (GD or Great Difficulty)

During the interview, the pre-service teachers emphasized that they encountered much difficulties in these three areas. Difficulties are due to individual differences – students have different learning styles, attitudes, and values. Most of them stated that they always find it difficult to prepare lesson plans with necessary activities and identifying appropriate teaching strategies to use which suits individual differences. The finding confirms the studies of [4], [7], [8], [10] that pre-service teachers encountered difficulties in classroom management as classrooms are overcrowded, lack of resources inside the classroom and attitudes of their students. Aside from that, this finding also affirms [10] that pre-service teachers faced challenges during practicum because of learners' limited knowledge on the subject matter and language barrier.

Interestingly, analysis shows that pre-service teachers have the greatest difficulty along each area on the following indicators:

(a) involvement of pre-service teachers to activities in and out of the school

There are many activities in and out of the school, however, due to lack of teachers, pre-service teachers are tasked commonly to stay and facilitate the teaching and learning. These out of the school activities of the department of education are not a requirement during the pre-service teaching. Further, limitations of field trips as set by the Commission on Higher Education and safety of pre-service teachers are always considered by the school administrators, hence they only require them to attend in school activities.

(b) communication skills

Pre-service teachers of MPSPC come from different tribes with different dialects in the province as well as nearby provinces. However, during their deployment, they are assigned to any cooperating school. According to the respondents, they cannot easily adapt to the new environment which results in low self-confidence. Hence, when they encountered difficulties, they lack the confidence to communicate with their cooperating teachers. One pre-service teacher from a nearby province stated that it was difficult for her to understand the dialect used by their cooperating teacher during break or lunchtime. Hence, she tends not to speak any in order not to make mistakes. To solve such issues on communication, a student suggested that pre-service teachers should have more rigid training in speaking in front before deploying for them to boost their self-confidence.

(c) conduct of meetings

The respondents claimed that there is a need to conduct more meetings where pre-service teachers will voice out issues and concerns involving pre-service teaching. It was observed that meetings are only conducted prior to

deployment but seldom after the deployment. Hence, difficulties met during the off-campus pre-service teaching are only brought out during year-end meetings.

(d) students' attitudes and behaviors

Individual differences greatly affect the students' attitudes and behaviors. With these different attitudes and behaviors, pre-service teachers find it difficult to identify appropriate activities, and strategies to use. Pre-service teachers who were deployed in big schools observed that the attitude and behaviors of their students are greatly affected by the size of the room, and lack of facilities. Hence, students are not focused during class activities. With the problems encountered due to students' attitudes and behaviors, it was suggested that training on blended learning, output-based activities, and new teaching strategies be conducted for pre-service teachers.

(e) interpersonal relationship

The pre-service teachers claimed that they had problems with interpersonal relationships with their peers. This may be some of the consequences of not having regular meetings and as a result, pre-service teachers tend to work by themselves. This boils down for supervisors to consider other modes of communication to regularly inform students of the benefits of a good working relationship.

(f) skills needed to perform the task, and

While the college made its best to prepare the pre-service teachers for a more challenging part – the pre-service teaching, they claim that they still lack the necessary skills needed to perform their assigned tasks. This is obvious as they suggested that pre-service teachers need to have more training on preparing daily lesson plans, and school forms in order that they can help their cooperating teachers. They also suggested that there is a need for other modes of communication such as Facebook group account, blogs, and Google classroom. Such that they can seek help regarding their assigned tasks from their peers, student supervisors and instructors in their field of specialization.

(g) classroom facilities

Lack of classroom facilities is an evident problem in the public school system. According to the respondents, this is a common problem in most of the cooperating schools. They experience inadequate instructional materials, crowded classrooms, inadequate laboratory equipment, and other facilities. This requires efficient and effective pre-service teachers in order to make a classroom conducive to learning. Teachers must be resourceful and creative in developing alternative materials and identifying appropriate strategies to be used in teaching.

Findings imply that varied difficulties are encountered by pre-service teachers during the pre-service teaching

from different major fields of specialization. This is very alarming for every higher educational institution like the Mountain Province State Polytechnic College as well as cooperating schools to consider when planning appropriate activities or programs for pre-service teachers. These varied difficulties need to be identified, such that each difficulty per special field of specialization will be addressed.

The results corroborate with the findings of Abas (2016) that there are varied perceptions related to difficulties of pre-service teachers from different major programs. He identified that difficulties are generally on students, assigned tasks, and learning environments.

3.2. Degree of Acceptability of the Probable Strategies

Table 2 shows that generally, the probable strategies that can be used to address the difficulties encountered related to the seven support areas are moderately acceptable as indicated by a grand mean of 3.15. This implies that the strategies can address difficulties in practice teaching. HEIs may consider these strategies for the incoming pre-service teachers.

Providing instructional materials for basic education in the college library as a reference of pre-service teachers, as well as for all teacher education students; having more consultation with the Bachelor of Secondary Education (BSED) and Bachelor of Elementary Education (BEED) advisers, and offering more training relevant to the seven

support areas are considered the three most probable strategies by the respondents.

According to the respondents, it is evident that the college libraries do not have any reference books that can be used by pre-service teachers. They requested that the library should have books for Kindergarten to grade 12 which students can borrow as a basis in preparing their lesson plan as well as activities. This result supports [11] that resources really affect teaching especially for the pre-service teachers. Lack of equipment and poor resources such as books were cited as the top-ranked discourager in learning and real problems to the teaching-learning process [4] and [11].

Further, since the students are deployed in different cooperating schools, other modes of communication through Facebook group account, blogs, and Google classroom must be considered by student supervisors. Such mode of communication might solve difficulties that they encounter as they try to discuss with the group with the guidance of their supervisors. There would be sharing of experiences as well as best practices and strategies, and instructional materials among the pre-service teachers. The respondents reiterated during the interview that, more training be considered based on the top most identified difficulty per support area. This corroborates the studies of [7], [8], [10], and [11] that seminars or workshops on resilience and interpersonal skills be most useful including teaching strategies to support the pre-service teachers.

Table 2. Degree of Acceptability of the Probable Strategies

Recommended Strategies		Field of Specialization				Overall Mean	
		BEED	English	Math	Science		SS
1.	The Teacher Education Department should annually update/revise the Pre-service training program in that planning should consider difficulties encountered by pre-service teachers.	3.13	2.93	2.93	3.11	3.13	3.05
2.	Offer trainings on the seven areas indicated in Part I.(e.g. new teaching strategies/pedagogies, instructional material development, new technologies, leadership trainings)	3.38	3.07	3.00	3.00	3.25	3.17
3.	Invite external speakers to discuss during trainings of pre-service teachers	3.21	3.07	3.07	2.89	3.19	3.11
4.	Student teachers should have more consultation with teachers from cooperating schools (more consultation hrs)	3.33	3.07	2.87	3.11	3.06	3.11
5.	Have more consultation with the BSED and BEED advisers.	3.33	3.20	2.87	3.56	3.13	3.20
6.	Provide instructional materials for basic education in the college library as reference of pre-service teachers, as well as for all teacher education students.	3.25	3.40	2.73	3.56	3.25	3.22
Grand Mean		3.27	3.12	2.91	3.20	3.17	3.15
		VMA	MoA	MoA	MoA	MoA	MoA

Note: BEED (Bachelor of Elementary Education), English, Math (Mathematics), Science, SS (Social Studies)

Interpretation: 1.00-1.75 – (NA or Not Acceptable); 1.76-2.5 – (SA or Slightly Acceptable); 2.51-3.25 – (MoA or Moderately Acceptable); 3.26-4.00 – (VMA or Very Much Acceptable)

Pre-service teaching is a key event in the life of becoming a teacher. Reference [8] stated that field-based observation provides pre-service teachers first experience of entering into the world of formal school settings where work relationship, teacher-student interactions, preparations of class activities, classroom management, and adapting to the physical and social environment becomes one's daily routine. Higher educational institutions should involve their education students in more interactive training and seminars for them to be more aware of problems and issues concerning teaching practices. This is for them to master skills beneficial to the teaching profession [14], [17], and learn specific types of behaviors through good teachers [18].

4. Conclusions

The study documented what pre-service teachers perceived as difficulties in seven areas; administrative support, cooperating teachers, student supervisors, peers, students, related tasks, and learning environment. Findings show that the pre-service teachers encounter slight difficulties during their pre-service teaching. The findings also show that problems encountered by pre-service teachers vary from each field of specialization. It implies that the pre-service teachers have the necessary knowledge and skills needed in pre-service teaching however, they encounter difficulties in some indicators on the seven support areas. Pre-service teachers find greater difficulties in the top three areas namely students, related tasks, and peers.

Further, the findings show that the identified strategies are moderately acceptable to be used to address the difficulties of pre-service teachers. This implies that the pre-service teachers perceived that these strategies are acceptable strategies to address their difficulties. These strategies are equally important in the field of pre-service teaching in any field of specialization. Providing instructional materials for basic education in the college library as reference materials of pre-service teachers, as well as for all teacher education students; having more consultation with the BSED and BEED advisers, and offering more training relevant to the seven support areas is considered the three most probable strategies by the respondents.

As highlighted from the interview, individual differences among students, supervisors, and peers, lack of facilities, and lack of preparation and training are some of the key factors affecting the difficulties encountered by pre-service teachers. They emphasized that a need for rigid training for pre-service teachers be conducted before deployment to their respective cooperating schools.

Based on the conclusions drawn, it is recommended that Higher Educational Institutions (HEI) need to provide valuable opportunities in preparation for pre-service

teaching in every field of specialization such as in a form of training, seminars, and workshops. It is further recommended that a pre-service training program be crafted based on the findings and suggestions of the respondents. The HEI and the cooperating schools must prepare varied activities for their pre-service teachers. The cooperating schools and other stakeholders must show full support to the pre-service teachers by establishing a support system to immediately address such difficulties. It is also recommended that while considering the identified probable strategies, the college must provide instructional materials for basic education in the college library as reference materials of pre-service teachers, as well as for all teacher education students.

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