

Plea from Within: The Plights of Pre-service Teachers in the Midst of the New Normal of Education

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Abstract The new normal of education provides educators a huge leap and opportunities to re-invent the future. Affected by the turmoil of the pandemic are the pre-service teachers. This study found out that pre-service teachers need to learn the rigors of teaching through Narratology, a configural mode of understanding and principles – the meanings of their stories and experiences as part of an identity development. In light of the new phenomenon in education, the informants felt unprepared, but as to their experiences, they could adapt to technologies, and maximize their potentials. Some factors that were found to affect the pre-service teachers' pandemic student teaching are: lesson planning is tedious, and internet played a big role in their practicum. It is recommended that the experiences of the pre-service teachers may be incorporated in modifying the pre-service teaching practicum of the next pre-service teachers in the locale of the study in order to upskill them with the desired outcomes in the new normal of education; thus, future proofing the would-be teachers from this pandemic batch.

Keywords: *new normal of education, pandemic student teaching, pre-service teachers*

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1. Introduction

Student Teaching to pre-service teachers plays a pivotal role in preparing and evaluating their level of learning in the actual field of teaching. This serves as an avenue to apply theories, learn teaching styles, and profess their knowledge and passion from their more than three years of studying. As 21st century teaching turns its wheels, a technology driven virtual-reality teaching occurred in the course of the pandemic giving pre-service teachers a whole new world, providing the learners a continuation of their education amidst this disruption [1]. Diving into the online world, pre-service teachers experienced bugs and lags. Internet plays the biggest role in the script of the pre-service teachers as it has fueled the new normal of education [2].

The new normal of education caused by the pandemic brought different lockdowns causing the shut-down of almost all institutions globally. One of the most hardly hit is the education sector. Universities and schools which are classified non-essentials are then closed down throughout the country. As this was not anticipated, the challenge of being prepared for an off-campus teaching and learning was almost not possible [3]. This has been one of the faced problems of the pre-service teachers as they were

prepared for a face-to-face setup of teaching then suddenly thrown into facing the lenses of their devices in order to teach. The resources available and utilization of online materials, gadgets, and connectivity are at par another great concern in both pre-service teachers and learners.

The old face-to-face practicum for pre-service teachers is no longer applicable at the heights of the pandemic. The new norm is to face the learners given by your time at your own comfort and flexibility. Reference [4] claimed that online learning is found to be more effective as learners submit their outputs at the given time providing answers to every query raised by them. Simply because students have grown up with the omnipresence of advanced digital technologies affecting their learning conditions [2].

The nub of this study is: pre-service teachers as neophytes in the field are confronted with much challenging and mounting roadblocks in their student teaching program this pandemic. The documentation of their experiences in this pandemic student teaching may form an integral part in providing interventions and developmental plan to optimize their potentials as promising teachers in the near future.

1.1. Objectives of the Study

This study explored the pre-service teachers' plights during their pre-service teaching in the new normal of education.

Specifically, it aimed to describe the experiences of pre-service teachers in undergoing their student teaching in the new normal of education and to capture factors affecting the academic experiences of pre-service secondary school teachers in undergoing their student teaching in the new normal of education.

1.2. Theoretical Framework of the Study

The conditions and parameters of this study are anchored on the provisions and stipulations of Collaborative Theory of Learning.

Collaborative Theory of Learning. Collaboration is one of the factors that encapsulate promising academic progress in learning. This theory believes that learners rely on one another to accomplish tasks that they otherwise would not be able to complete individually and through this, the information retains longer [5]. In collaborative learning, individual participants take responsibility for their team learning and succeeding, but their roles and resources are left up to them [6]. The respondents of this study were already applying this theory. They were already enhancing this approach to their co-practice teachers, working together, critically thinking together, and learning to solve problems with their critic teachers and their students. Executing also this approach to their students helps them gain knowledge with each other and enjoy the class.

2. Methodology

This study employed the Qualitative Research Design using Narratology as strategy for inquiry. The informants of this study, where the qualitative data came from, were the 15 pre-service secondary school teachers who underwent their Student Teaching Program for the School Year 2020-2021 and who voluntarily joined the interview. They came from different major field of specializations who vouched that they successfully completed their Student Teaching Program. This is the main qualification for them to become key informants of this study. The informants explained their experiences including a configural mode of understanding and principles – the meanings of their stories and experiences as part of an identity development [7]. They comprehensively narrated their experiences in a Focus Group Discussion (FGD).

Three of the proponents personally interviewed the informants to gather the needed data in the study. Before the interview was conducted, the interviewers briefed the informants that their participation in the interview is voluntary and they can terminate it anytime. A consent form was signed by the informants although there is no known harm in the conduct of the data gathering. Transcripts of the interview were carefully transcribed and coded which were validated by a credible researcher whose credibility is beyond compare.

Audit trail was employed in routing the transcripts of the interview to the informants in ascertaining the veracity of the claims. Audit trail is an in-depth approach to illustrate that the transcripts are based on the informants' narratives. It also involved a description on how the data were gathered and analyzed [8,9]. The transcribed data

were routed back among the informants after the transcription process to ascertain the veracity of their claims during the interview and FGD sessions – 100% of the transcripts were documented and processed via audit trail. Moreover, the informants agreed on the transcriptions and vouched for the veracity of the content presented therein to be analogous to what they intend to express. Henceforth, the data are considered verified and valid.

Moreover, the gathered data were analyzed through Thematic Analysis. Thematic Analysis as applied to analyzing qualitative data employs systematic and rigorous synthesis of unequivocal qualitative data into curated and connected findings in a thematic framework of analysis and presentation [10]. Aptly, the analysis done in the research includes familiarization and organization, coding and recoding, and summarizing and interpreting [11].

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Experiences of Pre-service High School Teachers in This Pandemic Student Teaching Program

Pre-service teaching aims to provide hands-on experiences in the actual field of teaching [12]. Due to the pandemic, student teachers had experienced the new normal of education with all the shifts that happened in the mode of teaching and delivering learning modalities to students [13].

The narrated experiences of the informants in their pandemic student teaching centered on the following: the need to learn the rigors of teaching, the feeling of being unprepared, and adapting technologies, maximizing potentials.

The need to learn the rigors of teaching. There is a growing interest in the development of teacher education to meet the learning needs of the 21st century including skills in strategic thinking, critical thinking, and collaboration [14].

As the pandemic affected their courses, the subjects had limited them to study at their own pace, leading them to insufficient knowledge and putting them to a new environment where they are not meant to be. Pre-service teachers in the pandemic feel that there is something missing throughout their whole experience [15]. The informants in the current study describe their experiences as insufficient since they did not undergo the rigor of the actual student teaching. It is also zeroed in that their experiences with their tutees are superficial. Moreover, these experiences do not necessarily boost or develop their confidence in teaching.

The following transcripts qualify for the claim that student teachers need to learn the rigors of teaching in preparation for their future endeavors as professional teachers:

“...My experiences in PT are not enough for I did not learn the rigors of teaching. I am now wondering whether I can do it when I will be in the real teaching after my graduation...” S5

“...I know that I missed many things. I wanted to experience the real scenario of teaching. I know that having my tutee is very superficial...” S1

"...This is not enough. I wanted to have my PT in face-to-face modality so I can learn the beauty of teaching..." S9

"...I am not satisfied, I know that there is lacking, there is a missing link. I did not experience the totality of teaching. I want to improve my craft, yet I am unfortunate because of this pandemic..." S2

"...I have limited experience with my tutees, I know that there is a gap that I needed to learn which will be learned only through face-to-face..." S4

"... This PT did not develop me to become confident, I did not hone it. Handling a large group of students later will be another adjustment..." S8

The feeling of being unprepared. Pre-service teachers first experienced distance learning in the heights of the pandemic in 2020. Distance and blended learning including modular approach fueled the need to close the semester during those times. While online learning is well-employed in different schools and universities, researchers pointed some disadvantages [16]. The sudden change of the environment in learning and the curriculum and pedagogical reforms has become one of the most common factors of students being unprepared in their endeavor [17]. Skills particularly in laboratory and trade courses were not mastered by many students. Online learning made them feel of being unprepared.

Students are given the flexibility of their time in online learning. The academic resilience of the students or their ability to respond adaptively to the difficulties encountered is seen as a major factor affecting the learning success of the students. Moreover, the impact of online learning is deemed negative because of the unpreparedness of the institution and its stakeholders [18, 19]. These concordances are also observed in the current study as seen on the informants' responses on not being prepared for laboratory classes.

The following transcripts qualify the claim that the informants hold an academic reservation on their preparation as a teacher brought about by the CoViD-19 pandemic:

"...my problem is on the laboratory side, the hands-on learning of the students. I am burdened by the fact that I am not (also) prepared for some laboratory techniques because of the pandemic. This makes me wonder especially when I will be applying for a job..." S3

"...This is not enough. I think I am not trained to become a teacher. My experiences are not enough yet I feel that my preparations especially in the majors are not enough, too! We had self-study last year (2020)..." S10

"...I think it is not enough. I am not even prepared academically especially in my major. I even seek help from my classmates and knowledgeable others who can help me explain things. This is my problem now..." S12

"... This PT makes me realize that there is a missing link from the theory that I learned in my Professional Education courses. I wonder if I can do it..." S14

Adapting Technologies; Maximizing Experiences. The new normal presents a unique challenge to every educational leader and stakeholder particularly along decision-making process [20]. The technological implications of this pandemic are very good avenues in

redefining the basic dimensions of education and learning. As the pandemic is concerned, teachers are in a gamut of challenges including their adaptations to educational technologies.

The pandemic was first known to be a threat, but as people adapt to it, it was seen as an opportunity in developing technologies and leading the world to gain access to what has been missed due to the pandemic. Thus, the pandemic made the teachers and learners adapt to new technologies and maximize their experiences and abilities in the new normal [21,22].

In the current study, the informants opted to adapt with the new normal by embracing them in their midst as they believe that this is the new normal of education. This is also seen as an avenue to maximize their potentials being 21st century educators.

The following transcripts qualify for the claim that the informants are maximizing their potentials in adapting to the current situation brought by the CoViD-19 pandemic:

"...I want to look at it in a brighter side. I want to maximize my experiences in going online. This is the new name of the game. This gives me learnings on using technologies although it would have been better if our PT is still face-to-face..." S6

"...It is enough for me since we are in the new normal. I wanted to adapt with it so I need to be computer literate. I am now learning how to handle this situation..." S7

"... I think it is enough. My CT is good and we are both adapting..." S11

"... It is ok for me. I am resilient since then. I was striving, I am adapting. The success in today's education depends on the students..." S13

"... It is not really enough. I am adapting (in terms of technologies and the new norms) and exuding much to learn in as much as I can, but it is not enough..." S15

3.2. Factors Affecting the Experiences of Informants in This Pandemic Student Teaching

The pandemic drew heightened issues of digital equity as distance education and online learning, in many cases, became the means for learning and instruction [23]. As the new normal is seen to be the norm even after the pandemic, students have become more and more digitally connected. Where everything is online, the source and its closure, is also online. There are a lot of factors affecting students learning in the new normal, which could be an advantage or a disadvantage to them [24].

The narrated experiences of the informants in their pandemic student teaching paved for the identification of the following factors that contributed to their experiences: internet fuels the new normal of education, going online is challenging, lack of resources: impedes productivity, the need for a formal set-up, lesson planning is tedious, and connection for social interaction.

Internet fuels the new normal of education. The Philippines is one of the countries offering the slowest and most expensive internet connection in Asia. The bloodline in the new normal of education is the internet as it provides a wide array of information needed by anyone [25,26].

As the education of the world shifted to the new normal, the internet played the biggest role not just to the students but also to the teachers. The main source of information gathering is from the internet. Queries, clarifications, and other factors are to be asked via the internet. The internet paved the way for the learners to easily survive the new normal in education. As to learners today had awakened with the developing technologies, it has been easier for them to adapt to the sudden change in the system. However, internet connection is the greatest factor affecting the learners. In the locale of the study, some places have weaker connection or some do not have any connection at all, but generally internet connection in the country is expensive [25,27,28,29].

In the current study, the informants claimed that internet is their hero in this pandemic. For this reason, they need to secure a good internet connection although they are burdened in having internet for their studies. The study of reference [30] claimed that students in this pandemic are mostly internet dependent as teachers are seemed to be absent. Moreover, the informants claimed further that Mr. Google seems to be their teacher in this pandemic. Apparently, the student-teachers in the current study also faced similar problems with the informants of the reference [30].

The following transcripts qualify for the claim that the internet fuels the new normal of education:

"...internet connection is a great problem..." S2

"...I am financially challenged. I needed to secure stable internet connection..." S6

"...I am also challenged with my internet connectivity. I wanted to do better but I am confronted with much problems..." S7

"...I am also confronted with my internet, it is just my hero. Without it, I cannot do anything..." S8

"...I needed to go online but I do not have stable internet..." S9

"...internet connectivity is my major concern..." S11

"...internet connection is also a problem..." S12

Going online is challenging. The challenges of online learning post a great escalation than that of a traditional one because they are required to reach their students and teach them via online platforms [26,31].

Online learning is challenging as to some factors that need to be considered such as the connectivity, area, and of course, the monetary consideration or financial capability of both teachers and learners. Going online in education at the early shifts of the pandemic is indeed exigent. However, going online will stay in the system even after the pandemic. Students, teachers, and whosoever involved need to maximize their capabilities and abilities in the new normal [25,32,33,34].

The following transcripts qualify for the claim that going online in the new normal of education is challenging:

"...the adjustment from the usual face-to-face to going online. Going online is challenging..." S4

"...Online classes are challenging but I needed to learn this as this is going to be the new normal of education..." S6

Lack of resources: impedes productivity. Adapting to online teaching, pre-service teachers face significant challenges in maintaining development and supporting the

learners' needs (35). As their practicum is done at their comfort zones, resources are not enough to produce instructional materials and other needs for learning such as printers, speakers, and others [36].

During the traditional classes, the needs of pre-service teachers are already given in terms of a classroom, laboratory materials, supplies, and equipment, and other instructional materials readily for use. However, the pandemic disrupted the traditional one giving us the new normal. It is then where pre-service teachers need to be creative and resourceful in terms of their needs [37,38,39].

The following transcripts qualify for the claim that lack of resources among the informants impedes their productivity:

"...I am having difficulty in terms of my resources like the tools and equipment that I need to have so I can teach better. So I needed to source out: I borrowed and sometimes, I needed to buy..." S3

"...I am confronted with my resources, e.g. tools, equipment, books. So, I always resort to Mr. Google..." S7

"...I am confronted with my resources, tools, and equipment. How can I deliver my lessons with limited books to read...?" S8

"...I lack resources, tools, equipment, books, etc..." S13

"...resources: I needed some tools, equipment, books, etc. I needed to have those so I can plan and teach better..." S12

"...I am having problems with my tools, equipment, reading materials, etc..." S14

The need to have a formal set-up. The pre-service teachers had been required to make their own classroom at the comfort of their homes. The classroom must be of a formal set-up ensuring that their tutees or students feel as they were really in a classroom.

Pre-service teachers' need to assure the conducive experience of the learners even in the situation they are into [39]. Making them feel the same as if they were in a traditional learning. A classroom setup will ensure the learners' comfort in studying. The classroom is where the teachers build a relationship with what and how students learn. It is also seen as one of the teachers' strategies in making the students learn – as to comfort [40,41].

The following transcripts qualify for the claim that teaching in the new normal of education needs a formal set-up:

"...I am having difficulty in making a make-shift classroom. My tutee needed to feel that we are in a classroom; he needs to feel that he is in a formal set-up..." S3

"...Establishing a set-up at home (Classroom) is a problem..." S13

"...communication between student and teacher. I know that my explanation is superficial and I can still do better but I am confronted with my connection with my tutees. How I wish that there is a face-to-face connection..." S1

Lesson Planning is tedious. Lesson planning has been always the plight of pre-service teaching. It is one of the major concerns when it comes to evaluating the competencies and preview of the over-all outcomes. Since

it is the blueprint of the learning process, it must be done cautiously [42].

There is an old saying that when you fail to plan, you plan to fail. Lesson planning should be carried out properly and effectively [43]. This underscores the statements of the informants that lesson planning is hard for them especially on the construction, revision, and instructional preparation. Moreover, the time frame during their submission to their cooperating teacher for correction and editing is another factor. In addition, financial constrain was also seen as a factor on their instructional material construction as some of them are financially challenged.

The following transcripts qualify for the claim that lesson planning nowadays is tedious especially in the eyes of the informants:

"...lesson planning is tedious thing to do (revisions).

The waiting time is toxic as checking is done online with my CT..." S5

"...lesson planning is stressful – from motivation, to enrichment activities. Sometimes, I cannot understand what my CT is trying to implement..." S6

"...Developing IMs is a problem. I am financially challenged..." S10

"...Module development is an ordeal for me..." S15

Connection for social interaction. The enactment of online student teaching is a precursor to social learning to others. The study of reference [44] pointed out the importance of connection among pre-service teachers that allows them to support and collaborate with their academic and practicum journey. The importance of social interaction is substantial to collaborative learning. Through the connection established by the pre-service teachers online through the different online platform, they were able to exchange information and ideas essential in their student teaching period. According to reference [45], the improvement of interaction poses a significant increase in the quality of distance learning.

The following transcript qualify for the claim that the informants need connection and interaction with their classmates:

"...I needed to be connected with my co-PTs to socialize and discuss things. I needed support..." S14

The student teaching program is very crucial as it prepares potential teachers in the norms and culture of teaching. This offers various experiences where different skills and knowledge can be applied and discover. Contrary to the common, the phase of online student teaching program has become a challenge for the pre-service teachers as being the first to experience such endeavor. According to the study of reference [14], the preparation of teachers for the 21st century skills is becoming a growing interest. Evidence claimed by reference [46] was centered on the idea that the teaching quality of pre-service teachers was positively influenced by their learning satisfaction. This drives their motivation to exert more efforts to learn in different context: the rigors of teaching as their perceived experience in the online student teaching is not enough [47]. The presumption that the experiences of student teaching may affect their pedagogical learning and development is evident in the claims of reference [39]. The abilities to

work in schools are fostered through campus or school-based learning.

The findings suggest that unpreparedness is one of the key factors that affects their performances while conducting their student teaching. Likewise, the pre-service teachers' instinct to adopt technology has to be maximized during their practicum. To exemplify, the importance of internet connectivity is the blood stream of knowledge delivery and interaction in the new normal. However, results of the study of references [25,36] claimed that Philippines has the slowest and most expensive internet setup. This underscores the factors affecting the experiences in their student teaching which includes the lack of resources like stable internet connections, multi-media tools, gadgets, and social connections which impede their over-all productivity and performance.

Moreover, the effect of online communication had greatly affected their lesson planning and make-shift classroom. In the study of reference [45], it is claimed that the improvement of quality of distance learning could be improved by raising the student and teacher quality and quantity of interaction [48, 49, 50]. According to reference [51], the online and social interaction of higher education students in their online learning was affected by the state of their online learning environment. In addition, reference [52] stressed the importance of feedback in getting the best for online learning on the part of the pre-service teachers. The lesson planning in this set-up was describe by the pre-service teacher to be tedious in terms of feed backing and correction was slow due to the set-up of online checking.

Nevertheless, the rigor on the experiences of the pre-service teachers in their pandemic student teaching have become a connecting bridge into their development. Their experiences yielded their motivation to learn and strive harder amidst the different challenges they met.

4. Conclusion

In light of the experiences of the pre-service teachers undergoing their practicum in the new normal of teaching and on the parameters of this study, the following are concluded:

1. The pre-service teachers need to learn the rigors of teaching. In light of the pandemic, they have felt unprepared; however, they need to adopt with the emerging educational technologies for them to maximize their potentials;
2. The internet fuels the new normal of education. Indeed, going online is challenging. It is in this premise that the informants see the connection between their internet infrastructures and their productivity.
3. The pre-service teachers need a formal set-up in conducting their pandemic student teaching. For them, learning is still best when it is conducted in a formal setting; and
4. Lesson planning is tedious as what it has always been. The pre-service teachers need to have their connection with their co-pre-service teachers for their social interaction.

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