

# A Phenomenological Study of the Lived Experiences of Pre-service Teachers in Online Practice Teaching amidst the Covid-19 Pandemic

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## Abstract

The Lived Experiences of Pre-service teachers in the online practice teaching amidst the Covid -19 pandemic were examined in the study. A phenomenological qualitative study, it used interviews in the collection of data. Interviews were recorded, transcribed and thematically analyzed. In the Analysis of data, themes, sub themes and substantial statements were identified. Advantages and disadvantages of virtual practice teaching and the preferred modality of participants in practice teaching were explored. Disadvantages include: lack of training in online strategies; no real classroom experience; they were not able to apply the teaching strategies they learned; difficult to measure assessment result, and of utmost concern is the problem of internet connectivity. Thus, there is a need for technology training for virtual teaching before the actual practice, draw real life experiences for assignments and projects to ensure originality of work, and leniency in dealing with students with problems of connectivity.

**Keywords:** Online Teaching, Practice Teaching; Lived Experiences, Pre-service teachers, Teacher Education, Covid-19

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## Introduction

In order to improve education in the country, efforts must be made to ensure that teachers are adequately equipped to assume a variety of tasks and responsibilities. Teachers' education institutions (TEIs) in the country have been responsible for ensuring that pre-service teachers are well-prepared with the necessary skills and dispositions to succeed in the classroom (Magulod, 2017; Ulla, 2016) pointed out, pre-service teacher training plays an essential role in ensuring that future teachers are well-prepared for the profession. The Covid 19 pandemic, on the other hand, was the most disruptive to education. More than 94 percent of the world's student population has been affected by the closure of schools, institutions, and other learning facilities, which has resulted in a wide range of changes in their life. (Pokhrel & Chhetri, 2021). Consequently, digital teaching and learning became the new standard. The infrastructure for online instruction is lacking in many schools, and students are unable to use their computers or the internet because of this. Teachers and students in the beginning of the process were searching for new ways to teach and learn since face-to-face instruction was no longer available (Delgado & Arellano, 2021). There is a lot of emphasis on hands-on learning in the classroom and laboratory at the university. In order to bring all of these academic activities online at once, it was extremely difficult (Chakraborty, Mittal, Gupta, Yadav, & Arora, 2021). Throughout the world, this pandemic has disrupted and distracted humanity on a variety of local and global scales (Moshtagh, Mirlashari, & Amiri, 2021). The pandemic had a direct impact on student teachers' educational and teaching experiences, which were documented in their personal narratives. Student teaching coordinators in both models played a critical role in keeping student teachers in the loop during these real-world experiences. A study by (Piccolo, Livers, & Tipton, 2021). Face-to-face interaction and mass gatherings are no longer permitted at Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), both public and private. Everyone was able to adapt to working from home. Course syllabi and requirements had to be revised and adapted to accommodate alternate or remote teaching methods, both synchronous and asynchronous, for teachers and administrators. People's movement is restricted by the pandemic, therefore experiential learning methods such as large gatherings and face-to-face classes cannot be used as long as the virus exists (Islam, Nur, & Talukder, 2021; Simbulan, 2020) stated that a context-based, comprehensive, and relevant e-learning policy guideline was needed to be used during the emergency moment now and in the near future, this scenario made the researcher agree with them. As a result, pre-service teacher education programmes around the world are becoming increasingly field-based, with student teaching as the final capstone experience for pre-service teacher learning. Field-placement school advisers have been given new and unique responsibilities to help pre-service teachers learn to teach, which necessitates innovative ways to teacher mentorship (Bloomberg). Pre-service candidates did not have the opportunity to demonstrate mastery of specific teacher performance standards in the online learning format, according to a study by (Hill, 2021) Because online learning is heavily reliant on the internet, (Alwehebi, 2021) noted that instructors or students with poor internet connections may be unable to participate in online learning. It was difficult for institutions, professors, and students to deal with the reliance of online learning on technological equipment and the provision of the equipment.

While there are many researches about Covid-19, education and pre service teachers, studies dealing with lived experiences of pre-service teachers in online practice teaching amidst the Covid- 19 pandemic are limited. (Yidana, 2018) explicitly stated that the lived experiences of pre-service teachers during teaching practice are often neglected in scholarly literature or if considered, not much emphasis is placed on other socio-cultural contexts that affect these practices. Most studies on teaching practice have focused on institutional challenges rather than personal challenges. Thus, to address this gap in literature, a phenomenological study was explored. This study aimed to understand the pre-service teachers experience in online practice teaching in terms of the advantages and disadvantages in virtual teaching. As (Toquero, 2020) emphasized, there is a need for educational institutions to strengthen practices in the curriculum and make it more responsive to the needs of the students beyond the conventional classrooms. The findings of the study can help higher education institutions review priorities to respond to the changing educational landscape and for educational leaders to improve the online teaching and learning environment. As (Chiu, Lin, & Lonka, 2021) put it, the pandemic reveals the urgent need to enhance the educational system's technological infrastructure, expand the teachers' pedagogical capability and the students' learning repertoire.

## METHODOLOGY

### Research Design

The study used the qualitative phenomenological research design. Phenomenology as a philosophy attempts to understand people's experiences in a certain phenomenon and is not limited to an approach to knowing, it is rather an intellectual engagement in interpretations and meaning making that is used to understand the lived world of human beings at a conscious level (Qutoshi, 2018). Further, phenomenological study aims to see the logic or meaning of an experience rather than discover causal connections or patterns of correlation ((Dukes, 1984)). As (Farrell, 2020) puts it in simple terms, Phenomenology is about understanding phenomena, or "things," as they appear to, or are experienced by, others. In this approach, the researcher investigates the meaning of the phenomenon from the participant's perspective. This phenomenological research aimed to explore the lived experiences of pre-service teachers in their online practice teaching endeavor amidst Covid-19 pandemic.

### Data Gathering

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and discussions via Google meet within a phenomenological method of inquiry. The researcher used the guide questions that were then analyzed. Thematic analysis (Bloomberg) was employed following the six steps; familiarization which includes transcribing the data and noting down initial ideas, coding interesting features of the data, collating codes into potential themes, checking or reviewing themes; defining themes which include ongoing analysis to refine specifics of each theme and naming each theme and producing an academic report of the analysis. The participants were asked via stream in Google Classroom either to confirm or verify the coded answers or did not reflect their experiences. The participants confirmed that it reflected their experiences and those summaries were correct thus, meriting research credibility. More so, an expert was also asked to verify the coded themes and sub themes. The profile of the participants was also asked for background purposes.

### Participants and setting

The participants of the study were the pre-service teachers or the graduating students of the College of Teacher Education who were enrolled in the Practice Teaching Course. Data was collected using a purposive sampling method through in-depth interviews with a semi-structured questionnaire. In choosing the participants, those who have experiences in the phenomenon under study and can be reached virtually and are willing to be interviewed via the Google meet medium. Inclusion criteria were being a graduating student or as pre-service teachers enrolled in the practice teaching course and consent to participate in the study. The researcher believed that they can help in shedding light on experiences of pre-service teachers in practice teaching.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

This study explored the Lived experiences of pre-service teachers under the practice teaching course using the online modality. Qualitative design was employed in which data collection and analysis used the method of phenomenological research. There were ten (10) participants who shared their experiences in the online practice teaching. All the participants were enrolled in the Bachelor of Elementary Education program (BEED); they were all pre-service teachers or graduating students and all had first time experience in the online practice teaching. The age of the participants ranged from 23 to 35 years old. Eight (8) were females and two (2) were males.

### Advantages of online practice teaching

#### Teaching experience

*(Practice teaching and demo teaching)*

"I am privilege to experience online practice teaching because I am allowed to impart my learning"

## Borderless Teaching

*(Classes conducted anytime and anywhere)*

"Even if I am far I can attend my class even if I will not go to school"

## Control of Time

*(Manage own time)*

"I control my own time and multi task while having my class. I can cook while discussing in the class"

## Technical skill

*(Explore and enhance skills in the use of technology)*

"Before pandemic I do not know virtual, don't know Google classroom and Google meet"

## Convenience *(Facilitate communication)*

"If there are announcements it is easy to access I will just open my mail not unlike before I need to go to school to see announcements in the bulletin boards"

## Safety

*(Not risky)*

"It is safe on our part, not to be infected by the virus"

## Reduce expenses

*(Minimal cost)*

"I can minimize my expenses because I will no longer pay for the boarding house and will not anymore pay for transportation"

## Described experiences in practice teaching. Advantages of online practice teaching.

One of the advantages of online practice teaching is that even in the pandemic time, the pre-service teachers were able to experience demo teaching and practice teaching in the new normal, but nonetheless, it was a privilege for them to experience imparting learning. More so, it can be conducted anywhere and anytime in which they can manage and control their own time. This positive experience was also mentioned by (Ogbonnaya, Awoniyi, & Matabane, 2020) that the most frequently reported positive aspect of online learning was the flexibility of time and place to learn. The practice teachers were also able to enhance their skills in technology because they now gained the skill of using Google workspace in teaching, like Google Meet, Google Classroom, Google forms and the like. Moreover, it is very convenient for them because of easy access in Gmail and Google classroom if there are announcements instead of the bulletin boards in school. For lecture delivery, participants found Google Hangouts to be the most effective tool; for course management and assessments, they preferred Google Classroom and LMS (Moodle). In addition, it's better for their health because they won't have to attend to school anymore, which means they won't be exposed to viruses. Because students no longer have to travel to school, they save money on transportation and boarding house costs. Online learning has several benefits for students despite its negative connotations, such as a loss of face-to-face interaction, a lack of social presence, and a lack of communication synchronisation. People who can't finish their studies and others who find themselves in a time of difficulty benefit greatly from online education (Eltayeb, Alharthi, Elmosaad, & Waggiallah, 2020)

## Disadvantages of Online Practice Teaching

### No real experience in teaching students

*(Absence of hands on experience)*

"We didn't experience the real classroom setting, not experience on how to talk and meet personally the students, on how to observe their behaviors and their personalities"

### **Limited strategie**

(Not able to apply the learned strategies)

“Strategies learned in three years were not applied in the online practice teaching”

### **No socialization**

(Absence of collaboration and interaction)

“No more bonding, cannot see their interactions”

### **No originality in work**

(Uncertainty as to who answered the assignments)

“In online we do not know who are making their assignments, it could be their ate or kuya. Students will just submit work from Google”

### **Lack of focus**

(Multitasking while having online class)

“Others are not listening while I am discussing”

“Students are just opening their accounts , not opening their cameras so we are not sure if they are listening or not or doing other chores”

### **Difficulty in assessing student learning**

(Inability to assess accurately)

“Difficult to measure if the students really learned”

### **Connectivity problem**

(Interruption of classes)

“My connection is very slow because I'm using only data and there is interruption of classes

“Not all students can attend the meet due to poor internet connection”

### **Lack of training**

(No training in technology)

“I need training in the conduct of virtual class because we did not receive any, it is just self learning and asking others how to do it and watch videos online”

### **Described experiences in practice teaching. Disadvantages of online practice teaching.**

One of the disruptions in the online educational setting that pre-service teachers enrolled in practice teaching course acknowledged the fact that they do not have real classroom experience wherein, they were not able to meet the students personally and were not able also to observe student behaviors. Hence, the absence of collaboration and interaction. As (Giles, Smythe, & Spence, 2012) emphasized, relationships are essential to the educational experience yet, taken for granted. (Lee, Fanguy, Lu, & Bligh, 2021) found that even while there was some level of social interaction available online, the lack of face-to-face contact considerably and negatively affected students' feeling of community and overall contentment. Students' output and activities were already a source of tension before the pandemic, but studying in the midst of a pandemic made it considerably more difficult. They were unable to interact with one other because technology was the sole means of keeping in touch (Robosa, Paras, Perante, Alvez, & Tus, 2021). In addition, they were concerned about the pupils' attention spans during Google Hangouts Students could be listening or not listening, or they could be accessing their account, turning off their cameras, and doing other tasks while taking an online class. They were also startled to hear that students do not want to reveal their faces during lectures in a study by (Chakraborty et al., 2021)). They believe this is due to students' reluctance to participate actively in the class. Additionally, (Dumford & Miller, 2018) found that students who took more online courses reported a worse quality of interactions and less exposure to effective teaching approaches. Students who took more online courses were more likely to engage in quantitative reasoning, according to new research. It was shown that they were less likely to participate in collaborative learning, student-faculty interactions, and discussions with other students, compared to their more traditional

classroom counterparts. More so, there was uncertainty as to who answered the turned in assignments of their students, difficult to determine originality of work. Hence, difficult to measure assessment result. This was also acknowledged by (Estrellan, Ferrariz, Lazona, Madres, & Estrellan) that the new mode was more comfortable and convenient to use however, assessing student learning and interacting with them was in general difficult. These practice teachers were exposed to different techniques and teaching strategies evident by participants answer however, it was dismay to them not to be able to apply the face to face teaching strategies they learned in the previous three years of their College education. In addition, the very common disadvantage for both the practice teachers and their students is the connectivity problem wherein the practice teachers themselves will be interrupted and disconnected while having their demo teaching or practice teaching. The other scenario is that not all students can attend in the synchronous Google Meet session because of poor connectivity. This was also one of the findings of (Ogbonnaya et al., 2020) that poor internet connectivity, the high cost of data, erratic power supply, lack of appropriate devices, inability to effectively manage their time, and family interruptions were some of the challenges experienced by the pre-service teachers. Moreover, one of the disadvantages is the lack of training in terms of the use of technology before the actual virtual practice teaching; consequently, they just explored it on their own and watched videos online. According to (Khanal, 2020) research, both teachers and students must have access to ICT resources and facilities; both groups must be adequately trained in digitalizing curricular materials for the successful implementation of virtual learning. Furthermore, (Oliveira, Grenha Teixeira, Torres, & Morais, 2021) found that the use of ICT platforms was largely beneficial whereas personal adaption was largely detrimental. When (Doering, Hughes, & Huffman, 2003) made it evident that a group of pre-service teachers, before and after engaging in an innovative technology component of a teacher preparation programme, imagined the use of technology in their future classrooms, the value of training in technology was clear. (Ogbonnaya et al., 2020) underlined that efficient online teaching and learning requires the basic information and communication technology infrastructure (hardware and software) that most schools and institutions, particularly in developing countries, may not have. In order to teach and study online, teachers and lecturers must have a working knowledge of both computer operations and the platforms utilised for this purpose.

### **Pre-service teachers' preference in practice teaching**

All the practice teachers when they were asked of their preference on the modality of practice teaching unanimously, preferred the face-to-face modality with the following reasons: "to experience the real classroom setting", "to experience how to teach personally", "the happiness derived from teaching face to face is different in the virtual world", "I cannot express well in online platform", "the strategies of teaching that I learned in the previous years can be applied in the face to face setting", "I can give more activities to students and there would be more interactions there by building strong relationship with students", "I prefer face-to-face because I can immediately consult and get feedback from my cooperating teacher." In the study of (Alawamleh, Al-Twait, & Al-Saht, 2020), results revealed that majority of the students prefer classroom classes over online classes due to many problems they face when taking online classes, such as lack of motivation, understanding of the material, and decrease in communication levels between the students and their instructors and their feeling of isolation caused by online classes. Moreover, in the study of (Kemp & Grieve, 2014), the results showed that students preferred to complete activities face-to-face rather than online. Students expressed a strong preference for class discussions to be conducted face-to-face, reporting that they felt more engaged, and received more immediate feedback, than in online discussion. These were contrary to (Kraglund-Gauthier, Chareka, Orr, & Foran, 2010) statement that across Canada and around the world, online technologies are becoming widely used and accepted as effective modes of learning.

## **CONCLUSION**

Based on the lived experiences of the pre-service teachers, the disadvantages outweigh the advantages in the online practice teaching of the pre-service teachers. The biggest challenge for the practice teachers was the absence of real experience in the four corners of the classroom. In the online practice teaching, it is evident from their experience that there was the absence of face-to-face interaction and collaboration. No socialization in the virtual world, no assurance of the originality of work submitted, no assurance of students' focus but, the most common problem was on connectivity, poor internet connection and the lack of training in teaching virtually. Hence, as emphasized by (Delgado & Arellano, 2021), leniency and understanding is of paramount importance in terms of the submission of requirements because of poor connectivity. Thus, I concurred to what (Selvaraj, Radhin, Nithin, Benson, & Mathew, 2021) emphasized that there is a need for more investment in technology and basic infrastructure development. This study is done in the belief that understanding lived experiences of pre-service teachers can improve and develop the field of education research and practice in the new normal.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

There is a need for training of the pre-service teachers students enrolled in practice teaching on the use of technology and teaching strategies in the virtual setting before the actual practice teaching. Likewise, the need for an increase in the use of technological tools in the virtual teaching-learning environment. Another is the need to cull out personal /real life experiences or localization for assignments, activities and projects to assure authenticity of work. Moreover, because of the poor internet connectivity as an issue in the province and in the region, leniency and understanding is of paramount importance in terms of the submission of requirements. There is also a need for institutions to strengthen pre service teachers' curriculum practices and make it more responsive to the needs of the students beyond the conventional classrooms. Higher education institutions must review priorities to respond to the changing educational landscape and for the educational leaders to invest in technology and improve the online teaching and learning environment.

## Consent

The participants consented for the interview evident by their individual presence in Google meet during the talk. They were informed that the interview conducted via Google meet will be recorded. They were also informed during the pre interview proper that the sharing of experiences will be recorded for transcription purposes and that data will be used for a research endeavor regarding their experiences as practice teachers. Participants' recorded consent has been preserved by the author.

## Ethical Approval

As per ethical standard, approval has been collected and preserved by the author, however, due to Covid 19 restrictions of face-to-face meeting hence, approval by the participants was done virtually via Google Meet and recordings of such was preserved by the author.

## Notes

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