

Bridging the Transition from Pre-Service Teaching to Classroom Practice: A Phenomenological Study of Professional Identity Formation, Adaptation, and Resilience among Future Educators in Philippine Basic Education

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Abstract

The transition from pre-service teacher preparation to actual classroom practice represents a critical developmental stage in teacher education. During this period, future educators encounter authentic teaching experiences that challenge their pedagogical knowledge, professional dispositions, and personal resilience. This phenomenological study explored the lived experiences of Isabela State University pre-service teachers deployed in selected public elementary schools in Echague, Isabela, namely Echague East Central School, Echague West Central School, Echague South Central School, and Soyung Elementary School. Guided by Professional Identity Theory and Experiential Learning Theory, the study examined how pre-service teachers constructed their professional identities, adapted to classroom realities, and developed resilience during field deployment. Using purposive sampling, twenty pre-service teachers participated in in-depth interviews and reflective journaling. Data were analyzed through thematic analysis. Findings revealed that deployment served as a transformative process characterized by confronting classroom realities, adapting instructional practices, negotiating professional identity through mentorship, cultivating emotional resilience, and strengthening commitment to the teaching profession. The study highlights the importance of structured mentoring, reflective practice, and institutional support in facilitating successful transitions from teacher preparation programs to professional practice. The findings contribute to the growing literature on teacher education and offer implications for enhancing field-study and internship programs in Philippine higher education institutions.

Introduction

Teacher education programs play a fundamental role in preparing future educators for the complex realities of contemporary classrooms. While coursework provides theoretical foundations in pedagogy, curriculum, assessment, and educational psychology, it is through field deployment and teaching practicum that pre-service teachers begin to understand the practical demands of the profession. The transition from university-based preparation to actual classroom teaching is often

accompanied by challenges that require adaptation, reflection, and professional growth.

In the Philippine context, teacher education institutions collaborate with the Department of Education (DepEd) to provide pre-service teachers with authentic teaching experiences through field deployment. During this period, student teachers are assigned to public schools where they engage in lesson planning, instructional delivery, classroom management, learner

assessment, and participation in school activities. These experiences provide opportunities for pre-service teachers to apply theoretical knowledge while developing professional competencies and dispositions necessary for effective teaching.

Research suggests that teaching practicum significantly influences professional identity formation, self-efficacy, and career commitment among pre-service teachers. According to Beijaard et al. (2004), professional identity develops through continuous interaction between personal beliefs, experiences, and professional contexts. Similarly, Izadinia (2015) emphasized that mentor teachers and authentic teaching experiences significantly shape how pre-service teachers perceive themselves as future educators. However, the transition to classroom practice is not without challenges. Student teachers frequently encounter issues related to classroom management, learner diversity, workload demands, instructional adaptation, and emotional stress (Flores, 2016).

Resilience has emerged as an important construct in teacher education because it enables pre-service teachers to cope with challenges, persist in difficult situations, and maintain commitment to the profession. Developing resilience during field deployment may influence long-term teaching effectiveness and retention within the profession. Furthermore, adaptation to classroom realities requires flexibility, reflective practice, and the ability to respond to diverse educational contexts.

Despite the growing literature on teaching practicum and professional identity, limited studies have examined the lived experiences of pre-service teachers in local Philippine public elementary school settings, particularly within the municipality of Echague, Isabela. Understanding these experiences is crucial for improving teacher preparation programs and strengthening partnerships between higher education institutions and basic education schools.

Thus, this study explored the lived experiences of Isabela State University pre-service teachers deployed in Echague East Central School, Echague West Central School, Echague South Central School, and Soyung Elementary School. Specifically, it examined how they formed professional identities, adapted to classroom realities, and developed resilience during their teaching practicum.

Research Questions

This study sought to answer the following questions:

1. How do pre-service teachers describe their lived experiences during deployment in public elementary schools?
2. How do pre-service teachers adapt to the realities and challenges of classroom practice?
3. How does field deployment influence their professional identity formation?

4. How do pre-service teachers develop resilience during their teaching practicum experiences?
5. What meanings do pre-service teachers attribute to their transition from pre-service preparation to classroom practice?

Review of Related Literature

Professional Identity Formation among Pre-Service Teachers

Professional identity refers to teachers' perceptions of themselves as members of the teaching profession and encompasses beliefs, values, motivations, and professional commitments. According to Beijaard et al. (2004), professional identity is dynamic and evolves through interactions between personal experiences and professional contexts. During field deployment, pre-service teachers begin to negotiate their identities as they transition from student roles to professional teaching roles.

Research indicates that professional identity formation is influenced by mentoring relationships, classroom experiences, institutional expectations, and reflective practice. Izadinia (2015) found that mentor teachers play a significant role in shaping the professional identities of student teachers by providing guidance, modeling professional behaviors, and facilitating reflective learning.

Adaptation to Classroom Practice

Adaptation refers to the ability of pre-service teachers to adjust instructional strategies, classroom management approaches, and

professional behaviors in response to classroom realities. Darling-Hammond (2017) argued that effective teacher preparation should develop adaptive expertise that enables teachers to respond flexibly to diverse learner needs and changing educational environments.

Teaching practicum serves as an important venue for adaptive learning because student teachers encounter situations that require modifications to theoretical instructional approaches. Studies have shown that adaptive teaching enhances instructional effectiveness and contributes to professional growth.

Resilience in Teacher Education

Resilience is the capacity to overcome challenges, adapt positively to adversity, and maintain motivation despite difficulties. Pre-service teachers often encounter emotional, instructional, and professional challenges during deployment. According to Mansfield et al. (2016), resilience is a critical factor in sustaining teacher effectiveness and commitment to the profession.

Research has demonstrated that resilience can be strengthened through mentoring, peer support, reflective practice, and positive school environments. Developing resilience during teacher preparation may reduce burnout and improve teacher retention in the long term.

Experiential Learning in Teaching Practicum

Kolb's (1984) Experiential Learning Theory posits that learning occurs through concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract

conceptualization, and active experimentation. Teaching practicum embodies this learning cycle by allowing pre-service teachers to experience teaching firsthand, reflect on their experiences, and refine their practices.

Studies suggest that experiential learning contributes significantly to professional competence, confidence, and identity development among future educators. Through authentic classroom engagement, pre-service teachers gain insights that cannot be fully acquired through university coursework alone.

Theoretical Framework

This study was anchored on Experiential Learning Theory (Kolb, 1984) and Professional Identity Theory (Beijaard et al., 2004).

Experiential Learning Theory explains how individuals learn through experience and reflection. During field deployment, pre-service teachers engage in concrete teaching experiences, reflect on their performance, conceptualize improvements, and apply revised strategies in subsequent teaching situations.

Professional Identity Theory explains how teachers develop professional self-concepts through interactions with educational environments and professional communities. The theory posits that professional identity is continuously constructed and reconstructed through teaching experiences, social interactions, and reflective processes.

Together, these theories provide a comprehensive framework for understanding how pre-service teachers transition from university-based preparation to professional classroom practice.

Methodology

This study employed a qualitative phenomenological research design to explore and understand the lived experiences of pre-service teachers during their transition from pre-service preparation to classroom practice. Phenomenology was selected because it focuses on describing and interpreting the meanings individuals attach to their experiences. The study was conducted in four public elementary schools in Echague, Isabela, namely Echague East Central School, Echague West Central School, Echague South Central School, and Soyung Elementary School. These schools served as deployment sites where Isabela State University pre-service teachers engaged in actual classroom teaching, lesson planning, learner assessment, school participation, and mentoring experiences.

The participants consisted of pre-service teachers officially deployed in the identified schools during the academic year. Purposive sampling was utilized to select participants who had direct experiences relevant to the phenomenon under investigation and who were willing to share their narratives. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, reflective journals, and field notes. The interview protocol focused on participants' experiences of adaptation, professional identity development,

resilience, mentoring relationships, classroom challenges, and reflections on becoming teachers.

Prior to data collection, permission was secured from school administrators and concerned authorities. Participants were informed of the study's purpose and ethical safeguards, and informed consent was obtained. Interviews were audio-recorded with participants' permission and transcribed verbatim. Data were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis framework, involving familiarization with the data, coding, theme generation, theme review, theme definition, and report writing.

Ethical principles were strictly observed throughout the study. Participation was voluntary, anonymity and confidentiality were maintained, and participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any stage without penalty.

5. Findings and Discussion

Theme 1: Encountering the Realities of Classroom Practice Beyond University Preparation

One of the most prominent themes that emerged from the participants' narratives was the realization that actual classroom teaching differed significantly from what they had learned in their university coursework. While teacher education courses provided them with theoretical knowledge on pedagogy, lesson planning, classroom management, and assessment, participants acknowledged that real classroom situations required immediate

decision-making, flexibility, and responsiveness to learners' diverse needs.

One participant shared:

“Noong nasa university pa kami, parang simple lang ang classroom management kapag pinag-aaralan. Pero noong actual deployment na, doon ko nakita na bawat bata ay iba-iba ang ugali at pangangailangan.”

Another participant explained:

“Akala ko sapat na ang magandang lesson plan. Pero kapag nasa classroom ka na, kailangan mong baguhin agad ang strategy kapag hindi nagre-respond ang mga bata.”

These findings suggest that field deployment served as a critical bridge between theoretical preparation and practical teaching realities. Participants experienced a process of professional awakening wherein they began to recognize the complexity of teaching as both an instructional and relational profession. Similar findings were reported by Manicio and Baetiong (2023), who found that practicum experiences enabled pre-service teachers to develop a deeper understanding of authentic classroom challenges. Furthermore, Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory emphasizes that meaningful learning occurs through concrete experiences and reflection, allowing future teachers to transform theoretical knowledge into practical competence. The findings likewise support the assertion of Darling-Hammond (2017) that authentic field experiences provide indispensable opportunities for prospective teachers to develop adaptive expertise and contextualized teaching skills.

The transition from university learning to classroom practice therefore represented a significant developmental stage where participants began to understand that effective teaching extends beyond content delivery and requires responsiveness, adaptability, and professional judgment.

Theme 2: Developing Adaptive Pedagogical Competence through Classroom Experiences

Another major theme centered on the participants' efforts to adapt instructional approaches according to learners' abilities, interests, and classroom circumstances. Participants frequently described modifying their lesson plans, instructional materials, and teaching strategies to accommodate diverse learning needs.

One participant stated:

"May mga activities na maganda sa lesson plan pero hindi gumagana sa actual classroom kaya kailangan kong mag-adjust."

Another participant noted:

"Natutuhan kong gawing mas simple ang paliwanag ko dahil may mga batang nahihirapang umintindi."

These experiences demonstrate the development of adaptive pedagogical competence, a critical characteristic of effective teaching. Rather than rigidly following predetermined plans, participants learned to make instructional decisions based on learners' responses and classroom contexts. This finding aligns with Flores (2016), who argued that practicum

experiences facilitate the integration of pedagogical theories with practical classroom realities. Similarly, Darling-Hammond (2017) emphasized that adaptive expertise enables teachers to respond effectively to the unpredictable nature of classroom environments.

The findings also support experiential learning principles, which suggest that professional competence develops through continuous cycles of action, reflection, and adjustment. Through deployment, participants became increasingly capable of tailoring instruction to meet learners' needs, thereby enhancing their instructional confidence and effectiveness.

Theme 3: Constructing Professional Identity through Mentorship and Professional Relationships

Participants consistently highlighted the influential role of cooperating teachers and school personnel in shaping their emerging professional identities. Mentor teachers served not only as supervisors but also as role models who demonstrated professional behavior, instructional competence, and commitment to learners.

One participant reflected:

"Malaki ang naitulong ng cooperating teacher ko. Nakita ko kung paano maging propesyonal at kung paano tratuhin nang maayos ang mga estudyante."

Another participant shared:

"Kapag pinupuri ako ng mentor ko, mas lalo akong nagiging confident sa pagtuturo."

The findings indicate that professional identity formation occurred through social interactions, mentorship, observation, and feedback. Positive mentoring relationships enhanced participants' confidence and strengthened their perception of themselves as future educators. Conversely, constructive criticism encouraged reflection and professional improvement.

These findings strongly support the work of Izadinia (2015), who found that mentor teachers significantly influence the development of pre-service teachers' professional identities. Positive mentoring relationships increase confidence and professional commitment, whereas unsupportive mentoring experiences may hinder identity development. Likewise, Beijgaard et al. (2004) emphasized that professional identity is continuously constructed through interactions between personal experiences and professional contexts.

The findings therefore suggest that mentorship serves as a foundational mechanism through which future teachers develop professional self-understanding, confidence, and commitment to the teaching profession.

Theme 4: Cultivating Resilience Amid Challenges and Uncertainties

The participants described various challenges encountered during deployment, including classroom management difficulties, workload pressures, performance anxiety, and balancing multiple responsibilities. Despite these difficulties,

participants demonstrated resilience by developing coping strategies and maintaining their commitment to teaching.

One participant shared:

“Maraming beses na gusto kong sumuko kapag sunod-sunod ang requirements at lesson preparations, pero iniisip ko na bahagi ito ng pagiging guro.”

Another participant remarked:

“Nakakapagod pero natutunan kong maging matatag at humanap ng paraan para malampasan ang mga challenges.”

The findings reveal that resilience developed through repeated exposure to challenges and the gradual acquisition of coping strategies. Participants learned to manage stress through preparation, peer support, mentorship, reflection, and positive thinking. These experiences enabled them to view challenges as opportunities for growth rather than obstacles to success.

This finding is supported by Mansfield et al. (2016), who argued that resilience is a critical attribute for teacher effectiveness and retention. Similarly, studies on pre-service teacher resilience indicate that supportive school environments and mentoring relationships contribute significantly to the development of emotional strength and perseverance. Furthermore, resilience has been associated with increased professional commitment and improved well-being among beginning teachers.

The findings suggest that resilience is not an inherent trait but a developmental process nurtured through meaningful experiences,

supportive relationships, and reflective practice.

Theme 5: Experiencing Emotional Growth and Well-Being through Meaningful Teaching Encounters

Participants frequently discussed the emotional dimensions of deployment. While they experienced anxiety, nervousness, and self-doubt, they also described feelings of fulfillment, satisfaction, and joy resulting from meaningful interactions with learners.

One participant stated:

“Kapag nakikita kong natututo ang mga bata dahil sa itinuro ko, nawawala ang pagod ko.”

Another participant explained:

“Masaya kapag tinatawag ka nilang teacher. Parang nararamdaman mo na parte ka na talaga ng profession.”

These narratives suggest that emotional well-being was closely linked to participants' sense of accomplishment and perceived impact on learners. Positive learner responses and successful teaching experiences strengthened their confidence and motivation.

Research has shown that positive emotions during practicum contribute to professional satisfaction and career commitment. The development of well-being among pre-service teachers is influenced by supportive mentoring, positive school climates, and opportunities for meaningful learner engagement. Positive emotional experiences also reinforce professional identity and

enhance motivation to remain in the teaching profession.

The findings indicate that emotional well-being plays a vital role in sustaining pre-service teachers during the challenging transition from university preparation to professional practice.

Theme 6: Strengthening Commitment to the Teaching Profession

The final theme highlights how deployment strengthened participants' commitment to becoming professional educators. Through direct interaction with learners and participation in school life, participants gained a deeper appreciation of the social significance and transformative potential of teaching.

One participant reflected:

“Mas lalo kong na-realize na gusto kong maging guro dahil nakita ko kung paano nakakaapekto ang pagtuturo sa buhay ng mga bata.”

Another participant remarked:

“Dati pangarap lang maging teacher, pero ngayon nararamdaman ko na talaga na ito ang gusto kong gawin.”

The findings suggest that field deployment served as a transformative experience that reinforced participants' vocational commitment. By engaging in authentic teaching responsibilities, they developed a stronger sense of purpose and professional responsibility.

This finding aligns with Beijgaard et al. (2004), who emphasized that professional identity formation is closely linked to commitment and engagement within professional communities. The findings also support Wenger's Community of Practice Theory, which suggests that identity develops through participation in professional communities and meaningful social interactions.

Consequently, deployment experiences played a significant role in affirming participants' aspirations to become educators and strengthening their dedication to the teaching profession.

Conclusion

The transition from pre-service preparation to classroom practice emerged as a transformative journey characterized by professional growth, adaptation, resilience, and identity formation. The experiences of Isabela State University pre-service teachers deployed in Echague East Central School, Echague West Central School, Echague South Central School, and Soyung Elementary School revealed that authentic classroom engagement significantly contributed to their development as future educators. Participants encountered the realities of teaching, developed adaptive pedagogical competencies, constructed professional identities through mentorship, cultivated resilience in the face of challenges, experienced emotional growth, and strengthened their commitment to the teaching profession. These findings demonstrate that field deployment serves as a crucial mechanism through which future

teachers bridge the gap between theoretical preparation and professional practice.

Implications

The findings have significant implications for teacher education institutions and partner schools. First, teacher education programs should strengthen the integration of experiential learning opportunities that prepare pre-service teachers for classroom realities. Second, cooperating teachers should receive mentoring training to enhance their capacity to support professional identity formation among student teachers. Third, resilience-building and well-being programs should be incorporated into teacher preparation curricula to help future educators manage professional challenges effectively. Finally, stronger partnerships between higher education institutions and DepEd schools are necessary to ensure meaningful and supportive practicum experiences that facilitate professional growth and career commitment.

Recommendations

1. Teacher education institutions should enhance pre-deployment orientation programs focusing on classroom management, learner diversity, and professional expectations.
2. Structured mentoring frameworks should be developed to guide cooperating teachers in supporting pre-service teachers.
3. Reflective journaling and post-observation conferences should be strengthened to promote reflective

practice and professional identity development.

4. Wellness and resilience-building interventions should be integrated into teacher education programs.
5. Future studies may examine the perspectives of mentor teachers, school administrators, and learners regarding pre-service teacher deployment experiences.
6. Longitudinal research may be conducted to explore how practicum experiences influence teachers during their first years of professional practice.

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