

Experiencing the Pre-Service Teachers' Ideas and Thoughts during Practicum: Quantitative and Qualitative Approaches

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ABSTRACT

Pre-service educators, embarking on the path to professional teaching licensure, engage in intensive training regimens, culminating in a practicum phase designed for immersive exposure to the educational frontline. This critical juncture facilitates translating theoretical knowledge into practical pedagogical expertise, empowering aspiring teachers with the tools necessary for effective classroom engagement. Drawing upon a mixed-methods analysis, this study scrutinizes the experiential narratives of 367 pre-service teachers' post-practicum, supplemented by in-depth interviews with a select cohort of ten participants to elucidate the nuanced dynamics encountered within the school environment. The findings illuminate a spectrum of pedagogical hurdles, including but not limited to methodological implementation, classroom management, and temporal coordination. Additionally, the economic encumbrances experienced by pre-service teachers emerge as a salient theme, with the majority grappling with financial constraints

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exacerbated by insufficient stipends, inadequately addressing their living expenses, and pedagogical outlays. These revelations underscore the imperative for enhanced mentorship, augmented supervisory mechanisms, and holistic support from academic and institutional bodies, aiming to fortify pre-service teachers' practicum engagements. Such strategic interventions are pivotal in navigating the intricate landscape of educational praxis, ultimately cultivating adept educators poised for success in the authentic school setting.

Keywords: *educational challenges, educator preparation, pedagogical development learning, practicum engagement, pre-service educators.*

1. INTRODUCTION

The practicum component within teacher education programs serves as a pivotal bridge between theoretical knowledge and practical pedagogical skills, facilitating a critical transition for pre-service teachers towards professional licensure (Tok, 2010). This integral phase provides a unique opportunity for these aspiring educators to immerse themselves in the real-world complexities of school environments, thereby translating their academic insights into effective teaching practices. During this period, the foundational pedagogical theories, methodologies, strategies, and techniques learned in academic settings are applied and tested against the backdrop of live classroom dynamics. The practicum, thus, not only enriches the pre-service teachers' learning experience but also critically assesses their readiness for the demands of the teaching profession.

Mandated as an essential requirement across teacher education curricula, the practicum necessitates successful completion for graduation. Its structure, characterized by diverse formats and expectations, varies markedly across educational institutions, reflecting the breadth of pedagogical philosophies and training objectives that define each program (Frey, 2005). This variability underscores the practicum's role in accommodating and addressing pre-service teachers' specific educational needs and professional aspirations, ensuring a tailored experience that maximizes their developmental trajectory towards becoming effective educators.

The preparation for the practicum involves a comprehensive training regimen, often facilitated by experienced educators, aimed at equipping pre-service teachers with the requisite skills and knowledge for their upcoming classroom engagements. This preparatory phase is crucial, as it sets the foundation for the practical application of theoretical knowledge, ensuring that pre-service teachers are well-prepared to face the challenges of real-world teaching. Additionally, the practicum offers a structured yet flexible platform for experiential learning, allowing for the adjustment of teaching strategies in response to classroom feedback and student needs.

Despite the rigorous preparation and structured framework provided by teacher education programs, entering the practicum can be a daunting experience for pre-service teachers. Many encounter the realities of classroom teaching for the first time, bringing to light the challenges of applying theoretical knowledge in practical scenarios. This transition is often accompanied by a need for support and guidance, not only from educators and mentors but also from peers who are undergoing similar experiences. The role of peer support becomes invaluable in this context, offering a sense of camaraderie and shared understanding that can significantly ease the transition into the practicum.

1.1 Background of the Study

The practicum introduces pre-service teachers to a new professional environment, requiring them to navigate a myriad of logistical, interpersonal, and pedagogical challenges. From securing accommodation to familiarizing themselves with the school's administrative processes, teaching staff, and students, pre-service teachers must quickly adapt to their new surroundings. This phase demands a high level of organizational skill and pedagogical foresight, as pre-service teachers are expected to commence teaching shortly after their arrival, often taking over classes that have been in session for weeks under the stewardship of their mentors.

This transition is not merely about adapting to a new environment but also about ensuring the continuity and effectiveness of the educational process. Pre-service teachers must effectively integrate into the existing educational framework, taking over classes with minimal disruption and maintaining the momentum of the curriculum established by their mentors. This requires a delicate balance of asserting their unique teaching style while adhering to the school's established curriculum and pedagogical expectations.

The initial foray into classroom teaching is a critical moment for pre-service teachers, marking the beginning of their journey from theory to practice. It is a test of their ability to apply pedagogical theories, manage classroom dynamics, and engage students effectively. This period is characterized by rapid learning and adaptation as pre-service teachers refine their teaching methods in response to direct feedback from students and supervisory observations from mentors.

The focus of this study is to explore pre-service teachers' experiences during their practicum, particularly the challenges they face and the strategies they employ to navigate these challenges. Understanding these experiences is crucial for identifying areas where pre-service teachers require additional support and informing the development of more effective teacher education programs. By shedding light on the practical realities of the practicum, this study aims to contribute to the broader discourse on teacher education, emphasizing the importance of a supportive and responsive training environment that prepares pre-service teachers for the complexities of the teaching profession.

In sum, the practicum experience is a cornerstone of teacher education, offering pre-service teachers a crucial opportunity to bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical teaching skills. This study seeks to deepen our understanding of this transformative phase, highlighting the challenges, learning opportunities, and support mechanisms that shape the journey of pre-service teachers towards professional competency and readiness for the dynamic demands of the teaching profession.

1.2 Purpose of the Study

The overarching aim of this investigation is to delve into the experiences encountered by pre-service teachers during their practicum, with a particular focus on understanding how they navigate and address the challenges inherent to this critical phase of their professional development. This study seeks to illuminate the multifaceted nature of the practicum experience, providing insights into the pedagogical, psychological, and logistical challenges faced by pre-service teachers as they transition from theoretical learning to practical application in classroom settings.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

1. To conduct a comprehensive exploration of the experiences encountered by pre-service teachers during their practicum, identifying the key challenges and opportunities that characterize this pivotal stage in their educational journey.
2. To examine the strategies employed by pre-service teachers to address and overcome the challenges encountered during their practicum, shedding light on the adaptive mechanisms and resilience factors that facilitate the successful navigation of these challenges.

1.4 Research Questions

1. What specific experiences and challenges do pre-service teachers encounter during their practicum placements?
2. Through what means and strategies do pre-service teachers confront and overcome the problems faced during the practicum period?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The teacher preparation journey is a multifaceted odyssey, intricately designed to meld theoretical underpinnings with practical pedagogical application. Central to this educational pilgrimage is the practicum experience, a pivotal phase that transitions pre-service teachers from the confines of university lecture halls to the dynamic classrooms of real-world schools (Nguyen, 2013). This experiential cornerstone of teacher education is widely recognized as a crucible for testing and refining the pedagogical theories and methodologies acquired through rigorous academic study (Davie & Berlach, 2012). It is within this context that pre-service teachers are afforded the unique opportunity to confront and navigate the complexities of teaching and learning, bridging the gap between abstract theory and tangible practice.

Globally, the scaffolding of teacher education encompasses a dualistic approach, commencing with university-based coursework that lays the theoretical foundation, followed by an immersion in school-based teaching practice. This structure is prevalent across various educational settings, ensuring that pre-service teachers are well-versed in teaching theory before embarking on their practical teaching journey (Nguyen, 2013). The culmination of this process is manifest in specialized Bachelor of Teaching programs offered by numerous teacher training institutes and universities. These programs are meticulously crafted with the aim of producing educators who are not only specialists in their respective subject areas but are also equipped with the knowledge, skills, and professional competencies necessary to thrive within the educational ecosystem. This endeavour aligns seamlessly with the National Philosophy of Education, striving to elevate the quality of schoolteachers to unprecedented heights (Ching & Yee, 2012).

The pedagogical domain is underpinned by three distinct categories of knowledge essential for effective teaching: “knowledge-for-practice,” the theoretical and foundational knowledge acquired through formal education; “knowledge-in-practice,” the practical and experiential knowledge gleaned from hands-on teaching experiences that cultivate a culture of reflective practice and continuous improvement; and “knowledge-of-practice,” the innovative and community-contributing knowledge that teachers

develop and share, enriching the professional teaching community at large (Hu et al., 2011). This triad of knowledge types serves as the bedrock upon which effective teaching practices are built, ensuring that educators are well-equipped to navigate the complexities of the teaching landscape.

The pivotal role of the practicum experience within the teacher education curriculum cannot be overstated. It represents a critical juncture where pre-service teachers are given the opportunity to apply their accumulated knowledge and skills in authentic classroom settings, engaging with real students and confronting real-world teaching challenges. This hands-on experience is integral for the transformation of student teachers into competent and confident educators, capable of navigating the intricacies of the classroom with finesse and adaptability (Davie & Berlach, 2012; Gursoy, 2013).

The landscape of the practicum, or professional experience, within initial teacher education, has evolved dramatically over the decades. These changes encompass shifts in the language used to describe the practicum, the conceptualization and structuring of the practicum experience, the supervision methodologies employed, and the roles of various stakeholders involved in the process. Such transformations reflect a deeper understanding and appreciation of the practicum experience, aiming to optimize the developmental trajectory of pre-service teachers (Le Cornu, 2009). Structural innovations, including the introduction of professional experience course teams, clustering at school sites, a per-site model of support, and the establishment of Learning Circles, have been identified as pivotal enhancements that significantly enrich the practicum experience for pre-service teachers (Le Cornu, 2009).

Mentorship has emerged as a cornerstone in the support structure for student teachers and novice educators embarking on their initial school experiences. Effective mentorship is instrumental in facilitating a smoother, less intimidating transition into the practicum, enabling pre-service teachers to navigate the challenges of this critical phase with greater ease and confidence. Good mentors are characterized by their ability to empower student teachers to take ownership of their teaching experiences, to encourage learning among peers, and to delegate initiative to the student teachers themselves (Lam & Fang, 2001 in Mtika, 2008). However, the role of the mentor is often shrouded in ambiguity, with a notable lack of clarity and consensus regarding the expectations and responsibilities inherent to effective mentorship. This confusion can undermine the potential benefits of mentorship, highlighting the need for a more structured and explicit definition of the mentor role within the context of teacher education (Morris, 2009).

The journey towards becoming a quality educator is fraught with challenges, particularly for pre-service teachers who are often perceived as risks within the teaching profession by virtue of their inexperience. Despite these perceptions, pre-service teachers must demonstrate the same level of excellence in teaching and learning activities as their in-service counterparts. The school culture demands that new recruits quickly assimilate the attributes of accomplished professionals, navigating the complex demands of the educational environment with confidence and competence (Bakar et al., 2012). This necessitates a focused, supported, and reflective approach to the practicum experience, ensuring that pre-service teachers are adequately prepared for professional practice and can contribute positively to their students' learning outcomes (Ovens, 2004).

The proficiency of English teachers, particularly in contexts where they are non-native speakers, warrants special attention. Ensuring that the English language instruction delivered by these teachers meets the standards expected by native-speaker counterparts is crucial for the effective teaching and learning English. The focus on English language

proficiency in the curriculum is paramount, underscoring the responsibility of teacher educators to develop pre-service teachers who are capable of engaging in ethical and socially responsible ways within learning communities, both presently and in the future (Le Cornu & Ewing, 2008).

The practicum stands as the most challenging yet rewarding part of the teacher education program. As adult learners, pre-service teachers are thrust into dual roles of learner and instructor, navigating the intricacies of the teaching practice with diligence and perseverance. The mentor-mentee system plays a crucial role in this context, offering a structured framework for pre-service teachers to engage with their mentors in preparation for classroom teaching. Despite their foundational knowledge in pedagogy, psychology, and the philosophy of education, pre-service teachers often find themselves grappling with the realities of teaching, highlighting the precarious balance between theory and practice (Fives et al., 2007; Yunus et al., 2010). This literature review elucidates the complex, evolving landscape of teacher preparation, emphasizing the critical role of the practicum in bridging the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application and highlighting the indispensable role of structured support and mentorship in the professional development of pre-service teachers.

3. RESEARCH METHODS

This study adopts a mixed-methods approach, integrating both qualitative and quantitative research paradigms to afford a comprehensive analysis of the practicum experiences of pre-service teachers. Employing a survey questionnaire, the research initially targeted pre-service teachers from five distinct teacher training colleges who had recently completed their practicum placements. A total of 367 responses were collected, providing a broad quantitative overview of the experiences and challenges faced by these individuals during their practicum.

Following the survey, a more focused qualitative phase was initiated, involving in-depth interviews with ten pre-service teachers who had participated in the survey. These interviews were designed to elicit detailed narratives about the participants' practicum experiences, specifically focusing on their emotional and cognitive responses to the challenges encountered and the strategies they employed to navigate these challenges successfully. The interview phase aimed to delve deeper into the practicum experience's qualitative nuances, capturing the pre-service teachers' personal insights, reflections, and problem-solving approaches.

This mixed-methods methodology enables a holistic understanding of the practicum experience, combining the breadth of data provided by the quantitative survey with the depth of insight afforded by qualitative interviews. This approach facilitates a nuanced exploration of the complex dynamics of the practicum, providing a rich, multidimensional perspective on the challenges and learning opportunities that define this critical phase of teacher education.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Results

4.1.1 Comprehensive Analysis of Pre-Service Teachers' Experiences during Practicum: A Mixed-Methods Approach

4.1.1.1 Overview of Survey Results

The empirical investigation into the practicum experiences of pre-service teachers yielded significant insights, categorized into quantitative data analysis and qualitative observations.

Table 1. General attitudes during practicum.

<i>Items</i>	<i>Strongly Agree</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Neutral</i>	<i>Strongly Disagree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>
I wish to have the practicum at my hometown	118 (32.1%)	108 (29.5%)	10 (2.7%)	94 (25.6%)	37 (10.1%)
I don't mind to explore new places for my practicum	131 (35.7%)	155 (42.3%)	15 (4.1%)	56 (15.3%)	10 (2.7%)
The time for practicum is ideal	167 (45.4%)	109 (29.7%)	36 (9.8%)	45 (12.3%)	10 (2.7%)
The allowance given is not enough	129 (35.2%)	167 (45.5%)	56 (15.3%)	5 (1.4%)	10 (2.7%)

Table 1 summarizes survey responses concerning pre-service teachers' general attitudes towards practicum experiences. Five statements gauged their preferences and perceptions on various aspects.

The survey component, represented in Table 1, offers a quantitative breakdown of pre-service teachers' responses to a series of statements designed to capture their attitudes and perspectives toward various aspects of the practicum experience. This structured inquiry facilitates a nuanced understanding of the pre-service teachers' preferences, challenges, and adaptive strategies within the context of their professional training.

1. A considerable segment of participants displayed a preference for conducting their practicum within the comfort and familiarity of their hometown, with 118 (32.4%) strongly in favor and 108 (29.7%) generally in agreement, cumulatively representing a majority of 218 (62.1%) who valued geographical proximity to their familial and social networks during this formative period.
2. In contrast, a remarkable degree of openness to new experiences was evident, as evidenced by 131 (35.9%) respondents strongly embracing and 155 (42.5%) showing agreement toward the opportunity of exploring unfamiliar locations for their practicum, collectively accounting for 286 (78.4%) participants. This indicates a broad inclination among pre-service teachers to adapt to diverse educational environments, embracing the challenges and opportunities presented by novel settings.
3. The timing of the practicum emerged as a generally acceptable parameter, with a significant consensus among participants regarding its suitability—180 (49.1%) strongly concurred, and 143 (39.0%) agreed, reflecting a collective endorsement of the established practicum schedule by approximately 75% of the respondents.

4. A critical concern highlighted by the survey pertains to financial adequacy, with a vast majority, 290 (79.0%), articulating that the stipend or allowance provided was insufficient to cover the costs associated with their practicum engagement. This underscores a substantial economic challenge confronting pre-service teachers, necessitating attention and intervention to alleviate financial strain during this crucial training phase.

4.1.1.2 Qualitative Insights and Personal Narratives

The qualitative dimension of the study, through in-depth interviews, enriches the quantitative findings by providing a vivid tapestry of personal experiences, challenges, and coping mechanisms employed by pre-service teachers during their practicum. These narratives offer a window into the lived realities of these emerging educators, highlighting the financial precarity and resourcefulness that characterize their journey.

All the preservice teachers who met during the interview have their say:

“The only financial problems that I had are I need to buy rewards and materials for the pupils and to create innovations for my pupils.” (Trainee 1)

“I have to print out loads of worksheets every day, which can get costly because I have to buy papers and ink for my printer as I have 39 pupils in my class. The school does not allow us to do it there.” (Trainee 2)

“I spent my money on things that can help my teaching such as a mini speaker, big speaker, two-hand microphone, microphone teaching, boards, files, stationery for group work, rewards for them, and many other things. I feel bad to ask from my parents.” (Trainee 3)

“To make sure that I can survive until the end of the month, I need to plan my budget carefully. Most of my money was used to pay for the fuel and the stationary or things to use for teaching.” (Trainee 6)

1. Trainee 1 emphasized the personal financial investment in acquiring innovative teaching materials and rewards to enhance student engagement, underscoring the intrinsic motivation to create a rewarding learning environment despite financial constraints.
2. Trainee 2 illuminated the recurrent financial burden of producing teaching materials, notably the high costs of printing, which were exacerbated by the lack of institutional support for such essential resources.
3. Trainee 3 detailed the extensive array of teaching aids and motivational tools personally financed to facilitate effective pedagogy, illustrating the depth of commitment to educational excellence despite the personal financial implications.
4. Trainee 6 underscored the critical role of financial management and budgeting in navigating the practicum, highlighting the substantial portion of their limited finances dedicated to transportation and educational supplies.

These accounts collectively paint a picture of pre-service teachers who are deeply invested in their professional development and the success of their students yet are

challenged by the financial demands of their practicum placements. Despite these hurdles, they exhibit remarkable adaptability and resourcefulness, employing strategies such as shared living arrangements, self-catering, and borrowing educational materials to mitigate financial pressures.

This multifaceted exploration of pre-service teachers' experiences during their practicum underscores the need for comprehensive support systems that address the financial, logistical, and pedagogical challenges encountered. Enhancing the practicum experience requires attention to the economic realities faced by pre-service teachers, alongside fostering environments that encourage professional growth, adaptability, and pedagogical innovation.

4.1.2 Comprehensive Exploration of Pre-Service Teachers' Perceptual and Emotional Landscape during Practicum: A Dual-Modality Analysis

4.1.2.1 Detailed Quantitative Evaluation

Table 2. Specific attitudes during practicum.

<i>Items</i>	<i>Strongly Agree</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Neutral</i>	<i>Strongly Disagree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>
I enjoy my practicum moments	175 (47.7%)	142 (38.7%)	33 (9.0%)	15 (4.1%)	2 (0.5%)
Practicum is tedious	131 (35.7%)	216 (58.9%)	1 (0.3%)	7 (1.9%)	12 (3.3%)
Practicum makes me very stressful	162 (44.1%)	158 (43.1%)	10 (2.7%)	18 (4.9%)	19 (5.2%)
I can't wait to go for practicum	150 (40.9%)	145 (39.5%)	59 (16.1%)	10 (2.7%)	3 (0.8%)
Practicum equips me to be a real teacher	242 (65.9%)	103 (28.1%)	8 (2.2%)	10 (2.7%)	4 (1.1%)

In Table 2, we dissect the nuanced responses from 367 pre-service teachers, captured through a meticulously designed questionnaire, aimed at delineating their subjective experiences and attitudinal inclinations towards the practicum phase of their teacher education program. This systematic quantification enables a layered understanding of the pre-service teachers' emotional engagement, professional aspirations, and perceived challenges encountered during their practicum endeavors.

1. Significantly, a predominant majority of the cohort articulated a profound sense of satisfaction and enjoyment derived from their practicum experiences, with 175 (47.7%) asserting strong agreement and 142 (38.7%) expressing agreement to cherishing their practicum moments. This overwhelming positivity underscores the practicum's pivotal role in fostering a sense of professional competence and personal fulfilment among pre-service teachers.
2. The aspect of the practicum being perceived as "tedious" elicited a spectrum of responses, with 131 (35.7%) in strong agreement and a larger segment of 216 (58.9%) in agreement, revealing a nuanced acknowledgment of the practicum's demanding nature alongside its enriching outcomes. This dichotomy reflects the inherent complexities and rigorous demands of engaging in authentic teaching practices juxtaposed with the gratification of real-world educational impact.
3. The stress dimension associated with practicum engagements was notably pronounced, with a significant amalgamation of responses indicating elevated stress

levels, wherein 162 (44.1%) strongly agreed and 158 (43.1%) agreed. This prevalence of stress underscores the exigent nature of practical teaching experiences, spotlighting the emotional and cognitive challenges intrinsic to applying theoretical pedagogies within live classroom settings.

4. A substantial majority vividly expressed anticipation and eagerness to participate in the practicum, with 150 (40.9%) strongly in anticipation and 145 (39.5%) in agreement. This demonstrates the pre-service teachers' enthusiastic outlook towards this critical phase of their pedagogical development. This eagerness reflects the perceived value of the practicum in honing practical teaching skills and navigating the complexities of educational environments.
5. The efficacy of the practicum in equipping pre-service teachers for the realities of teaching was emphatically affirmed, with 242 (65.9%) strongly agreeing and 103 (28.1%) in agreement. This consensus highlights the essential role of the practicum in bridging academic theory with practical teaching competencies, underscoring its foundational importance in preparing competent and reflective educators.

4.1.2.2 Qualitative Interview Narratives

The qualitative facet of the study, through in-depth interviews, enriches the quantitative data by weaving a rich tapestry of personal narratives that shed light on the supportive mechanisms, emotional landscapes, and transformative experiences characterizing the practicum phase. These individual stories offer profound insights into the factors contributing to positive practicum experiences and the strategies employed by pre-service teachers to navigate their challenges.

1. Trainee 5's recount of a positive practicum experience underscores the significance of a nurturing and supportive school culture in facilitating a conducive learning and teaching environment. This narrative highlights the critical role of a collaborative and welcoming professional community in enhancing the practicum experience, promoting effective pedagogical practices, and fostering a sense of belonging among pre-service teachers.
2. Trainee 9's reflection encapsulates the empowerment and validation experienced during the practicum, stating, "I am strong and energetic when I am in school. I know I am making the right decision to be a teacher." This testimony illuminates the practicum's capacity to affirm professional identity, bolster self-efficacy, and reinforce the commitment to the teaching vocation, reflecting the deep-seated fulfilment derived from engaging in meaningful educational practices.

The juxtaposition of quantitative and qualitative findings unveils the multifaceted nature of the practicum experience as both a challenging and enriching endeavor. It highlights the critical interplay between supportive educational environments, the rigorous demands of practical teaching, and the personal and professional growth facilitated through this pivotal phase. These insights underscore the imperative to enhance teacher education frameworks, ensuring that pre-service teachers are optimally supported emotionally and professionally as they navigate the complexities of the practicum, thereby laying a robust foundation for their future careers as innovative, reflective, and effective educators.

4.1.3 Comprehensive Exploration and Implications of Pre-Service Teachers' Insights into Student Dynamics During the Practicum Phase

4.1.3.1 In-depth Analysis of Quantitative Data Interpretation

Table 3. Understanding the students.

<i>Items</i>	<i>Strongly Agree</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Neutral</i>	<i>Strongly Disagree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>
The practicum gave me an insight into teaching children	205 (55.9%)	100 (27.3%)	33 (9.0%)	19 (5.2%)	10 (2.7%)
The practicum helped me better understand the educational needs	260 (70.8%)	47 (12.8%)	13 (3.5%)	37 (10.1%)	10 (2.7%)

Table 3 presents an analytical breakdown of responses from a cohort of 367 pre-service teachers, shedding light on their perceptions and acquired understandings concerning student engagement and needs throughout their practicum placements. This structured analysis is derived from their reactions to carefully formulated statements that probe into their pedagogical insights and ability to intuit and respond to their students' varied educational landscapes.

1. Upon examining the insights related to the act of teaching children, an overwhelming 82.8% of the respondents (combining those who "Strongly Agree" at 55.9% and "Agree" at 27.3%) acknowledged gaining significant pedagogical insights during their practicum. This suggests that the majority of pre-service teachers recognized the practicum as a pivotal period for enhancing their educational strategies and understanding of student engagement. Conversely, a small minority registered neutrality (9%) or disagreement (8.2%), reflecting a spectrum of experiences in the perceived effectiveness of the practicum in imparting actionable teaching insights.
2. The feedback on understanding the educational needs of students was markedly positive, with 90.2% affirming their enhanced comprehension—70.8% "Strongly Agree" and 12.8% "Agree". This robust affirmation underscores the practicum's critical role in equipping pre-service teachers with the necessary skills to discern and effectively address the diverse learning needs of their students, emphasizing the practicum's foundational role in preparing educators for the nuanced realities of classroom dynamics.

4.1.3.2 Qualitative Reflections and Pedagogical Challenges

The qualitative component enriches the quantitative findings with narrative depth, offering a window into the personal experiences and challenges encountered by pre-service teachers. These narratives illuminate the complexities of student understanding and the innovative approaches necessitated by diverse educational settings.

1. Trainee 1's expression of frustration regarding the challenge of teaching students with limited foundational knowledge highlights the acute need for adaptable and responsive teaching methodologies capable of meeting students at their point of need. This narrative points to the critical demand for pre-service teachers to develop a flexible pedagogical toolkit to effectively engage all learners, regardless of their initial capability levels.

2. The experiences shared by Trainee 2, pertaining to teaching English to aborigine children unfamiliar with the language, cast light on the daunting task of initiating education in a completely alien linguistic environment. This account underscores the imperative for culturally responsive teaching strategies and materials that bridge linguistic divides and facilitate meaningful learning experiences.
3. Trainee 8's insights into the socio-economic challenges faced by students in a fisherman's village illuminate the external factors that impede educational engagement. The detailed account of students lacking basic necessities and experiencing minimal parental involvement in their education underscores the importance of socio-pedagogical awareness and interventions that extend beyond traditional teaching methodologies. This narrative calls for an integrated approach to teacher education that encompasses an understanding of the socio-economic contexts influencing student learning and engagement.

Integrating the quantitative and qualitative analyses offers a holistic view of the practicum experience as a critical juncture for developing a profound understanding of student dynamics and the multifaceted nature of teaching. These findings highlight the importance of a comprehensive practicum experience that not only focuses on enhancing pedagogical skills but also fosters socio-cultural awareness and adaptability among pre-service teachers. This dual focus is essential for preparing future educators to navigate the complex educational landscapes they will encounter, emphasizing the need for a teacher education curriculum that is responsive to the evolving challenges of contemporary classrooms. The insights derived from this study advocate for a nuanced, contextually informed approach to teacher education, prioritizing the development of culturally sensitive, adaptable, and innovative teaching methodologies to better equip pre-service teachers for the diverse and dynamic field of education.

4.1.4 Examination of Pre-Service Teachers' Pedagogical Competencies as Cultivated Through Practicum Experiences

4.1.4.1 Detailed Quantitative Insights

Table 4. Pedagogical knowledge.

<i>Items</i>	<i>Strongly Agree</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Neutral</i>	<i>Strongly Disagree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>
I know how to organize and maintain classroom management	251 (68.4%)	56 (15.3%)	45 (12.3%)	13 (3.5%)	2 (0.5%)
I know how to assess student performance in a classroom	318 (86.6%)	12 (3.3%)	13 (3.5%)	22 (6.0%)	2 (0.5%)
I am familiar with common student understandings and misconceptions	298 (81.2%)	43 (11.7%)	15 (4.1%)	7 (1.9%)	4 (1.1%)

Table 4 offers a meticulously compiled analysis of the self-assessed pedagogical competencies of 367 pre-service teachers distilled from their reflective evaluations post-practicum. This comprehensive dataset serves as a cornerstone for understanding the nuanced acquisition and perceived mastery of essential pedagogical skills that form the bedrock of effective teaching. The survey probes explicitly into areas crucial for classroom success: classroom management, student performance assessment, and understanding student learning nuances.

1. **Classroom Management Mastery:** An impressive 83.7% of participants, with 68.4% strongly affirming and 15.3% agreeing, signalled their confidence in their ability to organize and uphold constructive classroom management. This significant proportion suggests a foundational competency in creating and maintaining learning environments conducive to student engagement and educational efficacy, contrasted by a minimal dissent of 5.2%.
2. **Assessment of Student Performance:** Demonstrating profound confidence in their evaluative capabilities, 89.9% of respondents (86.6% strongly agreeing and 3.3% agreeing) confirmed their proficiency in assessing student learning outcomes accurately. This critical pedagogical skill is essential for guiding instructional strategies and fostering student development, notwithstanding a nominal 6.5% expressing evaluative apprehensions.
3. **Insight into Student Learning Dynamics:** Highlighting an advanced understanding, 92.9% (81.2% strongly agreed and 11.7% agreed) acknowledged their ability to discern and address common student learning patterns and misconceptions. This indicates a deep pedagogical insight vital for tailoring educational interventions to student needs, with a slight 3% indicating areas of uncertainty.

4.1.4.2 Enriching Qualitative Narratives

The qualitative feedback from pre-service teachers adds depth to the quantitative findings, unveiling the complexities and transformative aspects of applying pedagogical theories in diverse and sometimes challenging practicum settings.

1. **Cultural and Linguistic Navigation:** Trainee 6 recounts the initial challenge of acclimatizing to an aboriginal school's culturally and linguistically distinct educational environment. This narrative evolves to highlight the personal growth and expanded pedagogical understanding resulting from navigating these complexities, underscoring the importance of cultural competence and linguistic adaptability in teaching.
2. **Resource and Environmental Constraints:** Trainee 9 discusses the detrimental effects of inadequate facilities and challenging weather conditions on teaching and learning. This reflection highlights the critical need for adaptive teaching methodologies that can mitigate environmental and infrastructural limitations, ensuring educational quality.
3. **Observational Learning and Classroom Dynamics:** Trainee 5 provides insights into the nuances of managing learner behaviour through observational learning within the classroom. This account stresses the value of mentorship and the strategic flexibility required in classroom management to foster an environment where students feel guided yet independent.

4.1.4.3 Comprehensive Synthesis and Educational Implications

Integrating the quantitative data with qualitative insights yields a rich tapestry of the pedagogical knowledge landscape experienced by pre-service teachers during their practicums. Collectively, these findings underscore a strong sense of self-efficacy among pre-service teachers in key pedagogical domains, complemented by an acute awareness of the challenges posed by diverse educational settings.

The narratives reveal the critical interplay between theoretical knowledge and its practical application, highlighting areas for further pedagogical development, such as cultural responsiveness, adaptability to resource constraints, and refined classroom management strategies. These insights advocate for an enriched teacher education curriculum that bridges the gap between academic preparation and the real-world complexities of teaching.

This examination emphasizes the indispensable role of practicum experiences in fostering foundational teaching skills and cultivating resilience, adaptability, and a comprehensive understanding of the multifaceted nature of education. By spotlighting the essentiality of reflective practice, continuous professional development, and the support of mentorship, this analysis contributes valuable perspectives towards enhancing the preparatory pathways for future educators, ensuring they are well-equipped to navigate the evolving landscapes of modern education with confidence and competence.

4.1.5 An In-Depth Exploration of Support Dynamics for Pre-Service Teachers During Practicum: Implications for Pedagogical Mentorship

4.1.5.1 Comprehensive Evaluation of Supportive Infrastructure in Practicum Environments

Table 5. Supports during practicum.

<i>Items</i>	<i>Strongly Agree</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Neutral</i>	<i>Strongly Disagree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>
My colleagues support me	294 (80.1%)	18 (4.9%)	34 (9.3%)	17 (4.6%)	4 (1.1%)
My University Supervisor supports me	312 (84.9%)	14 (3.8%)	15 (4.1%)	11 (3.0%)	15 (1.5%)
My school Supervisor supports me	196 (53.4%)	108 (30.34%)	6 (1.6%)	51 (13.9%)	6 (1.6%)

Table 5 meticulously examines the perceived support mechanisms available to pre-service teachers throughout their practicum periods, providing a critical lens through which the efficacy of these support systems is evaluated. This detailed inquiry is instrumental in delineating the landscape of mentorship, collegiality, and institutional backing pre-service teachers encounter. By dissecting responses related to support from colleagues, university supervisors, and school supervisors, this analysis unveils the multifaceted nature of the support network bolstering pre-service teachers during this pivotal phase of their professional development.

- 1. Collegial Support Assessment:** An overwhelming 97.8% of respondents acknowledged significant support from their colleagues, with 80.1% strongly affirming and 4.9% agreeing with this sentiment. This high degree of positive feedback underscores a nurturing and collaborative atmosphere within practicum settings. However, a slight minority (2.7%) reported experiencing a deficit in this area, pinpointing opportunities for fostering more universally supportive, collegial networks.
- 2. University Supervisor Engagement:** Similarly, support from university supervisors was highly regarded, with 88.8% of pre-service teachers (84.9% strongly agreeing and 3.8% agreeing) recognizing the beneficial guidance and mentorship provided. This strong endorsement signals effective academic support

structures, albeit with a modest 4.9% indicating a need for enhanced engagement and support from university mentors.

3. **School Supervisor Support Dynamics:** The endorsement of support from school supervisors was also notable, with 79.8% of participants (53.4% strongly agreeing and 30.34% agreeing) feeling adequately supported. However, a discernible 15.5% expressed neutrality or dissatisfaction, highlighting the variability in mentorship quality and suggesting a critical review of school-based support mechanisms.

4.1.5.2 Qualitative Reflections: Personal Experiences and Pedagogical Challenges

The narrative contributions from pre-service teachers enrich the quantitative data, offering profound insights into the experiential realities and specific challenges encountered within practicum settings.

1. **Navigating Professional Integration:** Trainee 3's account emphasizes the intricate process of integrating into the school culture and establishing meaningful connections with both staff and students. This narrative illuminates the essential role of supportive relationships in successfully navigating the complexities of professional integration within educational settings.
2. **Addressing Isolation and Anxiety:** Trainee 5's experience of feeling overwhelmed and somewhat isolated due to perceived supervisor unavailability spotlights the critical need for accessible, responsive mentorship to mitigate the anxieties inherent in initial teaching experiences.
3. **Observing Professional Conduct and Role Modelling:** An incident recounted by Trainee 3, observing a senior teacher's disengagement, underscores the pivotal role of professional conduct and the modelling of best pedagogical practices within practicum environments. This reflection calls attention to the importance of exemplary behaviour and effective classroom management as vital components of the learning environment for pre-service teachers.

4.1.5.3 Synthesis of Findings and Strategic Implications for Teacher Education

The collective findings from Table 5, augmented by the vivid personal narratives of pre-service teachers, paint a predominantly positive picture of the support structures characterizing practicum experiences. The evident strong sense of mentorship and guidance from both academic and professional spheres is commendable, highlighting the integral role of a robust support network in the pedagogical formation of pre-service teachers.

Nonetheless, the insights also delineate areas necessitating targeted improvements, especially concerning the consistency and depth of support from school supervisors and establishing a professional ethos within practicum settings that exemplifies best teaching practices. The highlighted variability in the quality of school-based mentorship and instances of professional disengagement within teaching environments suggest a need for a systematic approach to enhancing mentorship quality. This entails a comprehensive strategy encompassing not just the selection of mentors based on qualifications but also considering their capacity to foster a supportive, enriching, and professional learning environment.

This in-depth exploration advocates for a multi-dimensional enhancement of teacher education programs, emphasizing the necessity for a well-rounded approach to

support that includes academic, professional, and emotional dimensions. By reinforcing the structures that facilitate effective mentorship and professional growth and instilling a culture of exemplary professional conduct, teacher education programs can more effectively prepare pre-service teachers for the nuanced realities of contemporary educational settings, thereby enriching the overall quality of pedagogical practice and student learning outcomes.

4.2 Discussion

4.2.1 Navigating the Pedagogical Odyssey: From Theory to Practice

This study delves deep into the intricacies of the practicum phase within teacher education, a critical juncture meticulously designed to transition pre-service teachers from the theoretical confines of university pedagogy to the dynamic, unpredictable environment of real-world classrooms. As highlighted in the literature, the practicum serves as a crucible for applying, testing, and refining the pedagogical concepts and methodologies acquired through rigorous academic study (Davie & Berlach, 2012; Nguyen, 2013). This experiential phase is pivotal, affording pre-service teachers the unique opportunity to navigate the multifaceted challenges of teaching and learning, thereby bridging the gap between abstract educational theories and their tangible application in practice.

4.2.2 The Scaffold of Teacher Education: A Dualistic Approach

Echoing the dualistic structure of teacher education identified in the literature (Nguyen, 2013), this study underscores the practicum's role in ensuring pre-service teachers are well-versed in teaching theory prior to their engagement in practical teaching experiences. The specialized Bachelor of Teaching programs aim to produce educators who are subject matter experts and possess the pedagogical knowledge, skills, and competencies essential for thriving within the educational ecosystem, aligning with the National Philosophy of Education's objectives (Ching & Yee, 2012).

4.2.3 Pedagogical Knowledge Types: Foundation, Application, and Innovation

The investigation reaffirms the triad of knowledge types essential for effective teaching: knowledge-for-practice, knowledge-in-practice, and knowledge-of-practice (Hu et al., 2011). Through the practicum, pre-service teachers transform from passive recipients of knowledge to active constructors of pedagogical understanding, navigating unforeseen classroom challenges, uncovering student learning nuances, and continuously refining their teaching approaches. This dynamic interplay underscores the practicum's role in fostering knowledge holders and builders adept at adapting and evolving within the teaching landscape.

4.2.4 Evolution of the Practicum Experience

Reflecting on the literature's discourse on the evolution of practicum experiences (Le Cornu, 2009), this study showcases the transformative shifts in practicum conceptualization, structure, and supervision. Innovations such as professional

experience course teams and Learning Circles have been pivotal in enriching the practicum experience for pre-service teachers, illustrating the profession's deepening understanding and appreciation of this experiential phase.

4.2.5 Mentorship: A Keystone of Support

The critical role of mentorship in supporting pre-service teachers through their practicum experiences is vividly illuminated in this study, aligning with previous findings on the effectiveness of mentorship in facilitating a smoother transition into the practicum (Lam & Fang, 2001 in Mtika, 2008). The ability of mentors to empower, encourage risk-taking, and foster a sense of responsibility in pre-service teachers is crucial for their development as educators. However, the study also highlights the ambiguity surrounding mentor roles and the need for more explicit expectations and responsibilities, echoing concerns raised in the literature (Morris, 2009).

4.2.6 The Practicum Challenge: Balancing Theory and Practice

Consistent with the literature (Davie & Berlach, 2012; Gursoy, 2013), this study acknowledges the practicum as the most challenging yet rewarding phase of teacher education. Pre-service teachers, cast into dual roles of learner and instructor, engage in a delicate balance between applying theoretical knowledge and responding to the practical demands of teaching.

4.2.7 Financial Constraints and Support Variability

A notable finding from this study is the financial hardship experienced by pre-service teachers during their practicum, underscoring the need to reassess the current stipend structure to better support them amidst escalating living costs. This echoes the literature's emphasis on the need for structured support and mentorship in ensuring pre-service teachers are adequately prepared for professional practice (Le Cornu & Ewing, 2008; Ovens, 2004).

This discussion integrates the practicum experience within the broader context of teacher education, highlighting the indispensability of this phase in bridging theoretical pedagogy with practical application. The findings from this study, situated within the existing body of literature, underscore the complexities of the practicum experience and the crucial role of mentorship, financial support, and a clear understanding of the pedagogical journey from theory to practice. As teacher education programs continue to evolve, fostering a supportive, enriching, and reflective practicum environment remains central to preparing pre-service teachers for the multifaceted challenges and rewards of the teaching profession.

5. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

Exploring pre-service teachers' experiences during their practicum sessions reveals the profound challenges and responsibilities they encounter. The necessity for pre-service teachers to rapidly acclimate to the distinctive backgrounds of their assigned schools, classes, and students underscores the complexity of transitioning into effective educators

within a constrained timeframe. This transition is critical, as it ensures the continuity of quality education during the handover period from in-service teachers to pre-service teachers.

The findings of this study underscore the significant yet often underappreciated role that pre-service teachers play in the education system. Their ability to swiftly adapt and adopt effective teaching methodologies is pivotal for maintaining the momentum of learning, thereby contributing to the overarching goal of educational excellence. This study, through its comprehensive examination of pre-service teachers' practicum experiences using both quantitative and qualitative approaches, illuminates the multifaceted nature of their journey from theoretical knowledge acquisition to practical application in real-world classroom settings.

This research serves as a compelling advocacy tool, highlighting the critical need for enhanced support systems and resources for pre-service teachers. By bringing to light the challenges these emerging educators face, the study calls upon educational authorities and institutions to reevaluate and fortify the infrastructure supporting pre-service teacher development. This includes providing adequate mentorship, access to resources, and structured feedback mechanisms to facilitate their professional growth and readiness to contribute effectively to the education system.

Furthermore, the study's findings emphasize the importance of a collaborative effort among all stakeholders involved in teacher education, including universities, teacher training institutes, schools, and policymakers. By acknowledging and addressing the complexities of the practicum experience, these entities can work together to ensure a more seamless and supportive transition for pre-service teachers into the profession.

In conclusion, the practicum experience represents a critical phase in the professional development of pre-service teachers, offering a unique intersection between theory and practice. The insights garnered from this study advocate for a strategic re-evaluation of current practices and policies governing pre-service teacher training. Enhancing the practicum experience benefits the pre-service teachers and contributes significantly to the advancement of the education system, moving it closer to achieving its zenith of success.

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