
Teaching Senior High School: Through the Eyes of Student Intern

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ABSTRACT

This research aims to explore the experiences of SHS student interns in order to describe their training program and in an attempt to further enhance their skills as future teachers. The result of this study aims to be the basis in determining the skills needed to be further developed by the pre-service teachers.

This study used qualitative method using a case study. The data were collected by using semi-structured individual interviews with the 9 biological sciences pre-service teachers who participated in the study.

Results revealed that teaching senior high school students have both positive and negative impression in reflection to their teacher training program. It was further discovered that pre-service teachers have difficulty in classroom management and in teaching the content. In order to improve the student internship for pre-service teachers, the reflections presented should be considered in the process of curriculum designing as the basis for combining and integrating theoretical and practical knowledge.

Keywords: *pre-service teachers, teacher training, senior high school, teaching, challenges*

INTRODUCTION

Essentials of education are the core of the Philippines overall system. All national problems are mostly reliant on our educational system and one of the main element of education is teacher. As John Dewey (1997:80) states “education is the fundamental method of social progress and reform... through education society can formulate its own purposes, can organize its own means and resources, and thus shape itself with definiteness and [the] economy in the direction in which it wishes to move”. Hence, we need highly competent teachers. Currently, teacher education program has a very crucial place and effect on the educational system and consequently, on the nation’s future.

With the implementation of the K-12 curriculum, the new science program has many changes. In terms of instruction, the science program shifts from traditional methods of teaching to a more innovative exploration that emphasizes the enhancement of the students’ critical thinking and scientific skills. Also, it uses learner-centered approach such as the inquiry based learning pedagogy. Concepts and skills are being taught by providing pedagogy which will enable them to enhance their cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains.

Believing that quality pre-service teacher education is the key to quality education in the country, emphasis should be given in the preparation of these pre-service teachers. With

constant guidance and monitoring from the teacher educators, these pre-service teachers will learn how to handle and manage not just their daily lessons but the students and their classrooms as well. Moreover, they shall also be well-monitored, supervised, and guided by their supervising instructors during student internship.

Student Internship is an integral part of any teacher education curriculum since it is a good avenue for pre-service teachers to apply the theories they learned in the real classroom setting. Tuli and File (2009) agreed that practicum teaching experience among student-teachers provides students the necessary experience toward understanding the responsibilities of a teacher. Cheng (2013) also supported the finding that indeed, practicum is important in teacher education. In his study, he reported that teaching practicum is a tool that helps teacher-educators become competent in teaching.

Much has been said about the importance of teaching practices in in-service teachers' education (Quick and Sieborger 2005). Sadly, a component which receives little attention is about the quality of pre-service teaching practice (Kiggundu 2007; Hill et al. 2008). It is observed that the quality of the said training experience is closely related to few conditions, like: the suitability of practice schools, as well as the inconsistency between the curriculum of the practice schools and its faculties, the quality of the different personal traits of student interns and the supervisors, the practices by which pre-service teachers are directed in accordance with their competence related to their missions, and the quality of the professional guidance provided for pre-service teachers during this process.

It is also necessary for pre-service teachers to have the skills of transferring required subject matter knowledge to the learners. A pre-service teacher has to present an effective lesson plan on the subject matter, sufficient knowledge on the instructional strategies, activities, and learning difficulties, knowledge of the curriculum, and the knowledge of assessment (Kaya, 2009). It is known that this deficiency can be met by the teacher education program to be applied to prospective teachers.

A large body of research indicated that the teacher education programs failed to adequately prepare pre-service teachers (PTs) for facing real classroom (Stuart & Thurlow, 2000). Novice teachers reported that they have especially difficulty in coping with problems such as classroom discipline, assessing students' work (Veenman, 1984), and dealing with individual differences, relationships with parents (Vaughn, Boss & Schumm, 1997). These concerns make the teachers feel discouraged and somewhat strange in their profession.

It is important that these challenges be addressed, as they may affect the pre-service teachers' performance during student internship as well as their perception of the teaching profession in subsequent years (Quick and Sieborger 2005). According to Haigh, Pinder, and McDonald (2006,) practice teaching in education is still a challenge since it does not fully prepare student-teachers for the actual classroom teaching.

For this reason, this study aims to become the basis in determining the skills needed that will ultimately be further developed by the pre-service teachers. These can also serve as inputs to intervention programs, such as: the conduct of training/seminars and workshops that will enhance the least developed skills focusing on the realities of teaching and learning among pre-service teachers.

Research Question

This research aims to explore the experiences of SHS student interns in order to establish a suitable training program in an attempt to further enhance their skills as future teachers. Specifically, it sought to answer the following questions:

1. What are the issues and challenges faced by science student interns during the actual classroom teaching with the senior high school students?
2. What solutions can be offered to the issues and challenges faced by student interns in teaching senior high school students?

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND PROCEDURES

Methods

This study used qualitative method to collect data. Using a qualitative case study design, the study aims to discover pre-service teachers' experiences in their initial training in terms of difficulties they had experienced while performing their actual classroom teaching. Case study is an exploration of a complex phenomenon from multiple perspectives (Simons, 2009). One of its strengths is the foundation on real-life situations which results in a rich and holistic account that can often play a vital role in advancing a field's knowledge base (Merriam, 1998; Simons, 2009). While a small number of pre-service teachers' contributed to the current study, they were actively engaged in the phenomenon under discussion (teaching senior high) and provided front line insight into this area. The richness of qualitative data allows an intricate exploration of facts that delve into issues and identification of themes.

Locale

The study will be conducted at the Bukidnon State University. The said school is located at the heart of Malaybalay City, Bukidnon. It is one of the leading educational institutions serving the people, not only in Mindanao, but also the country, in general. Bukidnon State University offers varied programs of academic excellence along with diverse opportunities. Students can participate in relevant internship in local and international level, field experiences, and community service and leadership development. It is also known as a major supplier of teachers not only in the province but throughout the region. Rigorous improvements are aligned to address the global perspective of the University.

Participants

The participants included a total of 9 biological sciences pre-service teachers who were having their off-campus student internship at the Laboratory School. It is composed of 4 males and 5 females. Criterion sampling method (Yildirim&Simsek, 2005) was used to select the pre-service teachers who would be willing to participate in the study. The basic criterion for selection of participants is: he or she must at least be a student intern teaching senior high school students who is willing to participate in the study.

Instrument

The open-ended questions aimed to discover pre-service teachers' experiences in their initial training, specifically in terms of difficulties they may experience in actual teaching. It also attempted to discover the student interns' personal views on the teaching practice and encourage them to share their learning experience with others. Likewise, it also motivates the participants to give constructive suggestions for improving the teaching practice activity.

Data Gathering Procedure

The data were collected by using semi-structured individual interviews with the pre-service teachers who participated in the study. The interviews were held right after their off-campus teaching internship had been completed. The interview questions were prepared based on the research questions.

The responses on the open-ended questions were analyzed for emerging themes. In examining the qualitative data, the approach recommended by Bogdan and Biklen (1998) was adapted. Also, the responses were independently generated to coding categories based on the researchers' sense of the categories that emerged from the data. The results were extensively discussed in order to develop meaningful categories for the data. Finally, the responses were re-read and thoroughly analyzed, then adapted to the categories accordingly. Established, resulting in an acceptable degree of confidence about the participants' responses (Carmin & Zeller, 1991)

Consent of the participants was attained prior to the commencement of the interviews. Using an interview script, interviewees were informed of the purpose of the study, sources of data collection, participation risks and benefits, the digital recordings of the interviews, voluntary participation or withdrawal, confidentiality on the identity of the interviewees, and the time allotted for the interview. At the end of the interviews, all participants were thanked for their cooperation and involvement. To ensure accuracy of the result, transcripts were sent to participants for member checking. This offers a review and validation of the transcribed interviews.

DISCUSSION AND FINDINGS

Pre-service Teachers' Teacher Training Program as Reflected in the Teaching Internship

When participants were asked to describe their teacher training program as reflected in their teaching internship experience, two of them responded that the program was helpful to them. They become more knowledgeable in handling students during class discussion. Teacher 1 made mention that they were trained well in constructing lesson plans as well as in making different forms required by the institution, such as: the School Register and Daily Attendance Report of Learners. With these experience, they were able to overcome their weaknesses and improve their strengths.

Teacher 5 said that the experience was amazing and awesome, *"I have developed my confidence because in the very beginning, I was really nervous but as the time goes by, it*

develops". Teacher 8 said that the experience was authentic, especially during actual demonstration. *"It gives me an opportunity to showcase my skills in the overall task that was given to me. The whole experience was great and it's enough as my background to handle the future"* she said. Teacher 9 added that the preparation in terms of theories was excellent.

Pre-service preparation is the first step in building - and most importantly reflecting - on these cultural dimensions. Groundwater-Smith (1992) explains, teaching is first and foremost a social practice, and preparing the beginning teacher for the many complexities of the profession demands much more of teacher education programs than providing opportunities to practice technical strategies.

Real school situations where empowering pre-service teachers have proven successful and provide a basis for further guidance. Teaching is perhaps the only activity where pre-service teachers bring with them a history of observed practice. They acquired the knowledge and skills to develop a pedagogical content knowledge, to critique practice and challenge traditional pedagogy (Campbell-Evans and Maloney, 1997).

However, not all pre-service teachers have an affirmative experience. Some of them revealed that their experience was challenging and their teaching training program was not enough. Correspondingly, it was cited that their training program was not enough to suffice the needs of the K-12 program.

"I can say that my teacher training program is not enough, because we were not prepared for the K-12 program. Our training was still anchored to the RBEC. Also, teaching SHS is very challenging."(Teacher 3)

"I can only say that my background as a student teacher is not enough to face the real world of teaching. The transition/shifting of the curriculum made a great change in the phase of Basic Education. Belonging to the old curriculum has made me disadvantaged because the learnings that we got from our tertiary is not enough to suffice the needs of the K-12 students." (Teacher 4)

"Perhaps, what makes it more challenging is because the learning experiences in professional and general education subjects are for junior high school and I did not expect that I would be teaching senior high school student" (Teacher 9)

As challenging as it is, many hardships was experienced such as:

"Difficulty on the adjustment with students and with the content of the subject" (Teacher 6)

"Level of maturity of the students is well-developed which results to more serious teaching environment and teaching SHS students requires a lot of preparation and time" (Teacher 4)

"Our four years of training was more of learning what to teach and not about how to teach the content. We were not able to practice the strategies and methods that we've learned because we never got the chance to teach before internship" (Teacher 3)

These experiences reiterate the important role that the teacher education plays in supporting pre-service teachers. Lave(1991) states that when something is situated, it implies that “a given social practice, such as teaching or learning, is intricately interconnected with other aspects of ongoing social processes, and that the teacher needs to be attentive to these processes to maximize effectiveness.” It was indeed a situated learning experience for student teachers because they were introduced into a situation that challenged their perceptions about teaching senior high school.

Greeno, Collins and Resnick (1996) state that learning is situated, due to how a person learns a particular set of knowledge and skills, and the situation in which a person learns, are a fundamental part of what is learned. Thus, for situated theory in teaching and learning situations, the purpose of the engagement was not only about content, but more importantly, pre-service teachers’ pay attention to demonstrating when and how the learnt and experienced information could and should be used within and beyond the current situation.

Challenges of Biological Sciences Student Intern in Teaching Senior High School

It is known that education is about promoting learning and that teacher education is about promoting learning among pre-service teachers. But just like senior high school students face challenges in achieving the goals set for them, pre-service teachers face challenges in their internship, too. If this is not addressed and their needs are not understood, then their instructional approaches will be considered hit-or-miss.

It has been agreed that the introduction of innovative and more effective pedagogies that enable pre-service teachers to both conceptualize and ratify ways of doing and behaving in the classroom, has been exhausted. Yet, all of the pre-service teachers agreed that the one of the most challenging part in teaching senior high school students is classroom management.

“There are no big issues we are facing but common issues like noisy students, aside from classroom management issues.” (Teacher 2)

“One of the issues and challenges that I’ve faced as a student intern is classroom management. As an intern, I really find difficult to handle the senior high school students because most of them are of my age, so I was intimidated at first” (Teacher 3)

“Managing the classroom for the SHS students is one of the issue I faced, but later, I found out that they only need guidance since they are already mature in age” (Teacher 4)

“Students’ behavior because the students are sometimes not listening and we cannot control their behavior especially during the first day...” (Teacher 5)

“The issue and challenges that I faced was about attitude of the students” (Teacher 8)

“My inability to manage the classroom during my first demonstration was a great challenge.” (Teacher 9)

One of the areas in which pre-service teachers' predispositions remain most intractable in teacher preparation is behavior management (Wubbels, 2011). Many pre-service teachers have been shown to rely upon "tried and true" methods from their own schooling (Allen,

2009), with little consideration for new times, new generations of school students and, most importantly, new social behaviors. Also at play is the cautious anticipation, if not fear, that most pre-service teachers experience in relation to behavior management (Darling-Hammond and Bransford,2005).

Although strategies to promote positive behavior cannot be separated from other dimensions of teachers' pedagogy, behavior management has consistently proven to be the one that causes most pre-service (and in-service) teachers concern (Woolfolk and Margetts,2007).

Another challenge where all pre-service teachers manifested upon is the content of the subject matter

“The issues and challenges that I have encountered during my actual demonstration are the content of the subject matter wherein I found difficulty in understanding the topic” (Teacher 1)

“...we are going to teach “Physics” which is not my strength. I was used to Biology and Chemistry”(Teacher 3)

“Physics is the subject I hate the most because it is not my forte and I am not used to it” (Teacher 4)

“The most common challenge that I can associate to this is about the content of the subject. The contents are difficult and it really need thorough review” (Teacher 6)

“...about having an adjustment to the content of their lesson” (Teacher 7)

“We were exposed more on content rather than how to put it into practice” (Teacher 9)

The content knowledge of teachers matters in the classroom. Ball and McDiarmid (2007) noted that the content knowledge of a teacher is important because it affects their ability to teach and to support their students' learning. Teachers' content knowledge encompasses their ability to deliver the lesson, select activities for their students, and assess students' learning. Teachers with broad but articulated content knowledge tend to be more responsive in their classroom instruction (Roehler et al., 1990)

The Philippine education system had a curriculum revision from basic education to the enhanced basic education curriculum also known as the K12 Curriculum (Republic Act 10533). Thus, science teachers are no longer limited to teaching their subject specialization but rather teach all branches of sciences. In response to such change, pre-service training in the university should prepare teachers for such a scenario.

Proposed Solutions as Reflected by the Student Intern

This area allowed some common themes that pre-service teachers considered as solution from the challenges experienced during their internship. With regard to classroom management

“In order to solve those problem that I have encountered, I should exhibit classroom management” (Teacher 1)

“I would establish good classroom management to improve teaching and learning experience” (Teacher 2)

“For students’ behavior, the solution for this is imposing a classroom rules and regulation so that they have rules to follow and it can make the classroom more peaceful since there is a rule to be followed” (Teacher 5)

“One of the solutions could be by means of strengthening professional education especially on how to manage the class”(Teacher 9)

With concerns to the challenge in teaching the content, pre-service teachers cited

“...strive harder to understand the content of the subject so that I can deliver my lesson well.” (Teacher 1)

“...what is practiced in the Secondary Education should match with subjects taught by the interns” (Teacher 3)

“Instead of having old curriculum for us, they should provide enhanced curriculum subjects that will match the needs of the student in K-12 curriculum.” (Teacher 4)

“The only thing that I did to solve my problem about learning the content of my SHS student lesson is to give more time studying and researching in the internet so that I could have a lot of references to rely on for me to come up with a better understanding” (Teacher 7)

“Subjects that are offered in senior high school are advanced compared to us, therefore, course offering in the college of education should be amended” (Teacher 9)

Correspondingly, two of the nine pre-service teachers agreed that the format of the lesson taught in the teacher education should be the same format used at the internship site. Other concerns were also reflected by the pre-service teachers:

“I strongly believe that one of the solutions to solve the problems during our internship, is changing or improving syllabus for Education Students. “There should be more opportunities for students to practice even before internship” (Teacher 3)

“Before deporting the PSTs, the administration should provide enhanced/salient seminars/training programs that will broaden the skills of the PSTs. (Teacher 4)

“...PSTS should be ready or prepared because as a teacher, you should be ready in every situation...” (Teacher 5)

“The solution that I can offer to them is to ask them what they wanted to do in the future, then let them decide now how they are going to achieve that goal...I wanted to instill in their mind that one cannot achieve something overnight, instead you work on it over time.” (Teacher 8)

These opportunities are revealed during internship, when pre-service teachers reflect on their personal and professional experiences. Student Internship is such a period of training when the initial professional steps are made, when the attitude towards teacher’s activities are

shaped. It is the educational space where the quality of competencies acquired during the studies is revealed.

Hence, the purpose of internship is to help pre-service teachers acquire professional competencies and experience necessary for practical activity (Teacher Training Regulation, 2012). Pre-service teachers should be practitioners who continuously analyze and contemplate, i.e., reflect on their activities (Pečiuliauskienė, 2009). Reflection during practical studies enables self-observation, adjustment of one's goals, learning achievements, weaknesses (Bubnys, Žydžinaitė, 2010). Analysis of real educational problems and reflecting on personal experiences allow pre-service teachers seek for fresh knowledge and competencies, which are needed for the improvement of teaching practice as well as for the increase of professional motivation (Rodzevičkaitė, 2008).

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATION

One main concern of in the current study is how the pre-service teachers reflected in teaching senior high school students, the challenges and recommended solutions, in order that that teaching and learning would be more likely to have long-term usefulness to teacher education and future educators. Student interns involved in teaching senior high school should be invigorated to design their lessons with the student needs in mind to capitalize on this central quality issue.

Likewise, in order to improve the student internship for pre-service teachers, the reflections presented should be considered in the process of curriculum designing as the basis for combining and integrating theoretical and practical knowledge, and for learning from the own experience. The contents of subjects should also be accompanied with measures designed to develop and enhance the abilities of pre-service teachers.

It is incumbent upon teacher educators to ensure that those being prepared to enter the profession are equipped with knowledge and skills around behavior management, both as they progress through their internship. Teacher education institutions should help the pre-service teachers sustain the attitude and perhaps provide them with enrichment program to nurture their determination to take on the challenge.

This study only investigated biological sciences pre-service teachers teaching senior high school. It will also be interesting to explore the experiences of other pre-service teachers teaching senior high school.

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