

Experience is the best teacher: Experiential courses from the view of education graduates

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Abstract

This study, titled "Experience is the Best Teacher: Experiential Courses from the View of Education Graduates," explores the impact of experiential learning courses (ELC) on teacher preparedness and pedagogical competence among the Bachelor of Secondary Education (BSEd) graduates from Ilocos Sur Polytechnic State College. Using a qualitative research design, the study interviewed seven participants who had graduated between 2019 and 2023 and are currently employed as professional teachers. Findings reveal that experiential courses serve as essential preparatory phases, equipping future educators with practical skills and classroom management strategies. Participants identified these courses as effective and significant training grounds, providing insights and expectations into real-world teaching scenarios and enhancing preparedness for professional responsibilities despite challenges, such as the COVID-19 pandemic's disruption, reflective practices, and the development of pedagogical competence. Additionally, participants recommended developments to the said courses, including mentoring, in-campus internships, and the like, to further refine the learning experiences. These recommendations underscore the significance of continuous improvement in teacher education programs to meet evolving professional demands in this 21st century and the needs for globalization. The study concludes that experiential courses significantly contribute to teacher preparation, emphasizing the need for enriched and well-implemented learning opportunities. Future research is highly encouraged to extend this exploration across other teacher education programs and to investigate the long-term impact of ELC on career achievement.

Keywords: field study, experiential learning, BSEd graduates, teaching profession, teacher education

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1. Introduction

Havighurst (2024) stated that teaching profession is recognized as the largest profession around the globe. Department of Education (2016) also highlighted that teaching profession is beyond compare wherein they are highly-empowered individuals that educates learners. This is offered in many universities as part of the teacher education courses. They are considered frontliners in helping the learners realize their dreams. However, years of teaching preparedness is the key towards attaining a teaching degree and achieving professional license. Based on the CMO 75 s. 2017, the BSEd curriculum has offered courses on Field Study 1 & 2 and the Practice Teaching. The said courses were offered to let them experience actual classroom situations and learning environment where direct observation of teaching learning episodes that focuses on the application of educational theories learned in content and pedagogy courses will be made. The said courses are in support to the authentic experiential learning from field study and actual classroom immersion of the prospective teachers. In accordance with the NCBS domains, these were used as guideposts in developing the content, pedagogy and implementation scheme of the said course.

The Commission on Higher Education in the Philippines has created the Bachelor of Secondary Education with the goal of to create a generation that is prepared for the future and can respond to the demands of the economic trends and domains of the industry. However, there were concerns existing for a necessary kind of practices for practice teachers or pre-service teachers (Rao & Zongjin, 2021). A study then was proposed. This study aims to assess the effectiveness of practice teaching in enhancing the practical skills and classroom management abilities of pre-service teachers, to investigate the influence of field study experiences on the development of pedagogical knowledge and instructional strategies among teacher candidates.

Ajani (2023) emphasized the essence of Experiential Learning Courses or ELC to take up by the teacher education students. They learn better and can adopt better in real classroom settings. As experiential learning theory justifies the need of hands-on practices to enhance a learner's pedagogical content knowledge and professional responsibilities. When learners experienced first-hand knowledge and skills, they develop active engagement, activates self-reflection. Kolb and Kolb's experiential learning theory proved that experiential learning provides learners with abundant opportunities in order to discover learning inside or outside classroom context

In terms of the implementation of the experiential learning courses, Yacap (2022) stated that the results revealed that the ELC program has a good implementation as perceived by the groups of respondents from the province of the Northern Philippines. This justifies that the ELC is significant in the teacher education curriculum. It was recommended that strengthening implementation of the ELC is a need for the purpose of attaining intended learning competencies. Additionally, Radović, et al. (2021) showed that the active learning activities such as role playing, simulations, case studies and the like will facilitate opportunities for ELC. This could eventually increase achievement for learners when ELC is included into instruction. By having inclusion of ELC in the curriculum, this provides learners with multifaceted experiences. This further recognized the need for ELC and how it targets towards specific domains of learning.

A study of Swennen (2020) stressed that experienced-based education learning found to be complex and demanding yet helpful in shaping future educators. It was presented that teacher educators utilized their prior knowledge would help them form new experiences and supported authentic learning. The learners challenged future teachers or pre-service teachers and immersed them in field experiences such as internship. This highlights a gap that there is a lack of longitudinal studies measuring the long-term impact of ELC on students'

career success, readiness, and professional/personal developments, pointing to a need for extensive research in this field. This study was then crafted to understand the impact of practice teaching and field study experiences on teacher preparedness and pedagogical competence and to identify the possible avenues in improving experiential learning experiences among the pre-service teachers.

Statement of the problem - The study entitled “Exploring the Impact of Experiential Courses on Teacher Preparedness” aimed to answer the following questions:

- How do the participants view their experiential courses in relation to becoming a teacher?
- How did the experiential courses of the participants prepare them in becoming a teacher?
- What experiential activities may be included to improve the experiential courses of education students?

2. Methodology

Research Design - The study used the basic qualitative research design. This study will employ a qualitative phenomenological research design to explore education graduates' perceptions of experiential learning courses. The phenomenological approach is appropriate as it seeks to understand lived experiences and the meanings participants assign to those experiences. Jain (2023) described it as a research methodology that concentrates on exploring and understanding complex phenomena and the meanings attributed to them by the participants. It is concerned on the depth of experiences of human, their beliefs, attitudes and behaviors.

Population and Locale of the Study - There were seven (7) participants for the study. In the selection of the participants of the said study, these were following inclusion criteria: (a) a graduate of BSEd course with any major field in the NLPSC and/or ISPSC Main from 2019 to 2023, (b) currently employed as a teacher either in public or private schools, (c) a registered Professional Teacher, and (d) a regular student during his/her college years. These were the exclusion criteria: (a) Individuals were excluded from the study if they did not graduate with a Bachelor of Secondary Education (BSEd) degree from NLPSC or ISPSC Main between 2019 and 2023, (b) were not currently employed as teachers in either public or private schools, and (c) lacked a Professional Teacher's License, or were irregular students during their college years.

Research Instrument - The researchers utilized an interview protocol among the selected participants of the study. The said interview protocol contains the interviewee's name and background, the interviewer's name, the survey section and other topics discussed, documents obtained, and post-interview comments or leads. This also includes the purpose and the introductory protocol, then the set of interview questions and the probes/follow-up question depending upon the research questions. The post-interview comments and/or observations were also included in the said protocol form.

Data Gathering Procedure - After securing ethical clearance of the study, the researchers secured permission from the participants of the study. Then, the interviews had been conducted following ethical standards. To trace the graduates as participants, the existing group chats during their undergraduate days were used to communicate them with regards to their availability and willingness to join the said study. The said interview would be conducted through online messaging. Since the participants were employed, their convenient time were prioritized. The responses were recorded. The accumulated data were transcribed and coded in order to come up with the themes. The gathered data were analyzed through thematic analysis. Caulfield (2023) described the said analysis as a method of qualitative research examining data in order to identify common themes (topics, ideas and patterns of meaning that come up repeatedly).

Ethical Considerations - The researcher considered these ethical issues which are necessary for ensuring the privacy and safety of the respondents. To secure the consent of the respondents, the researchers provided an informed consent to discussed all important details of the study, including its aim and purpose. By explaining

these important details, the respondents understood the significance of their contribution in the completion of the research. The confidentiality of the respondents was also observed and assured by not disclosing their names in the research. The identity of the participants remained anonymous. The participants voluntarily participated to be questioned for the study. Only relevant details that will help the researcher in answering the research questions were included. The researcher gave the respondents enough time to complete their responses.

3. Results and Discussion

The results are presented and organized based on the three research questions explored in this study.

Problem 1. How do the participants view their experiential courses in relation to becoming a teacher?

The result found that the participants viewed experiential courses as a Preparatory Phase as an Effective Teacher. Participants 2 & 3 stated that it served as a training ground in their future actual tasks in the Department of Education (DEPED) and as a basis on how they teach the students in the basic education. Noor, et al. (2020) presented that the students or learners perceived experiential learning as a good learning environment in providing authentic scenarios and that they have overwhelmingly positive response to students' experiential learning.

Participants 1, 6 & 7 responded that experiential courses served to prepare students for the real-world setting in the teaching profession. Participant 4 also responded with this statement, *"The experiential courses help me to become an effective teacher. The courses hone me to become prepared and efficient teacher in terms of delivery of instruction, classroom management and doing other ancillary activities the we need to finished."* As the participants were already in the field of teaching as beginning teachers, participant 7 shared some of the experiences encountered during the practice teaching. The participant shared this statement, *"I, as their teacher, was not only boxed in pure teaching. I also interacted with them, became their moral supporter, and sometimes became their confidant. With all those experiences, I came to realize that— although it is not part of my job to become all of those I mentioned, I built connections with my students now that I am in the field and it made me feel accomplished when they tell me that I have touched their lives in a positive way."*

However, there was a factor affecting the first-hand experience such as during the peak of COVID-19 pandemic. One of the participants told related to this case and the adjustments made. Then, narrated this, *"When I was a pre-service teacher, I gained meaningful insights into the world of teaching. During this time, it was when COVID hit the educational system in the Philippines, leading to the disruption of classes. As a result, I did not have the opportunity to become a teacher-observer. However, after a year, as a fourth-year student ready to become a practice teacher, this is when observation and teaching began. In the first week, I observed my cooperating teacher, during which I adapted some of his teaching strategies. After a week of observing, I started teaching, where I encountered different kinds of students. I also had the opportunity to design and implement lesson plans to address various types of intelligences."* With the findings, this implies that experiential courses were positively perceived by the participants as contributors to their Becoming as a teacher.

Riera, et al. (2023) affirmed that the practical training during their field study experienced by the students would make them ready to meet the needs and demands of the teaching profession. This highlighted the significance of blending knowledge and the actual experiences or hands-on experiences to build an effective and efficient future educator or facilitator. Additionally, the said experiential learning would equip them in absorbing skills such as interpersonal, communicative, etc. and would equip them of their affective domain as role models.

Problem 2. How did the experiential courses of the participants prepare them in becoming a teacher?

The results found out that the experiential course is a training ground. With the exposure they have tried during their field studies, participant 7 emphasized this response, *"It gave me a glimpse of what I should expect and be doing in the future as I pursue my profession."* Participant 2 affirmed the said response and even

responded this, *"It gave me a lot of clues of what to improve and develop in preparation of reality."* This only means that the experiential courses direct the pre-service teachers in their career development and made them future-ready workforces.

Participant 4 also answered, *"It prepares me to teach students and deliver lessons in an effective way. It also teaches me to handle diverse students."* Participant 5 added, *"It serves as a plan wherein it shows the things that I need, the processes that I must employ, the rules or guidelines that I need to abide, and the learning experience that focuses on growth and development as a teacher."* Yacap (2022) stated that experiential learning is significant among all the education-related disciplines/courses. It had been highlighted that real-world experiences or authentic learning gained by the students provided them knowledge and gained teaching skills and values needed. It brings awareness and understanding of their theoretical foundations.

Clearly, the experiential courses led the pre-service teachers in building their foundations. All of the participants agreed that the learnings gained during their internship/apprenticeship were beneficial. Participant 5 said, *"Some of the remarkable lessons that I'm applying right now to my job and to my students is my sense of preparation, on what do I need to prepare, my lesson, strategies, my setup, and my delivery. Another is flexibility and adjustment due to the variability of set of students I am handling. In terms of my duty as an employee, I always employ punctuality, respect, and obedience to the people in authority."* Participant 1 also attested, *"Experiential courses have played a significant role in my current job. It taught me how to become an effective and efficient teacher. I applied various teaching philosophies, including the consideration of multiple intelligences."* Additionally, Participant 2 also asserted that through those courses, it made paper works easy due to the exposure they have experienced. Similarly, Participant 3 also stated that they already know how to manage the class and how they make the discussion engaging. This further implies the need for the continuous conduct of experiential courses among the pre-service teachers in the college. A similar study confirmed that field experiences positively impacted the education program even in the local setting and the international. The said experiences were also reported to be valuable learnings most especially when conceptual learning and real and relevant learning are inculcated (Akinde, et al., 2017).

Problem 3. What experiential activities may be included to improve the experiential courses of education students?

The participants highlighted the following recommended activities that might be added to heighten the experiential learning of pre-service teachers.

Table 1
Participants' List of suggested experiential activities

Suggested experiential activities
Making of test questions and table of specifications
Including psychological situations
Recognition-like activities to boost the communication to parents
Monthly retooling activity
In-campus internship
Allowing teacher substitutes
Mentoring activity of seniors to their juniors

Based on the accumulated suggestions, the participants 1 & 4 made a point to include the making of test questions and the TOS because they find it challenging most especially the differentiated activities. Besides, participant 5 suggested about the continuity of the field study and the practice teaching when they get back to their institution like teaching their juniors or doing the mentoring activity. Abas (2016) supported the findings that both in-campus and off-campus experiences would expose the pre-service teachers desirable or not that contribute to their improvements. However, one of the participants stated this response, *"I think that achieving the objectives in the Field Study is already enough to help education students grow and develop. Also, being open to criticism and always asking for things that they struggle with is another way to improve."* This implies that further enhancements should be made possible and the said suggestions would bring enrichment to the

course plan and monitoring and evaluation tools of the field study courses in the teacher education department. The findings confirmed the statement from the study of Abas (2016) that the teacher education departments are advocates of enhancing the coursework to help in preparing the future educators be the best versions. It is also expected that the experiences gained during the process of becoming a teacher should be multi-perspectival and complex (Ovens, et al., 2016).

4. Conclusions and Recommendations

Based on the results of this study, the following conclusions were drawn:

- The participants viewed their experiential courses in relation to becoming a teacher as a preparatory phase their becoming as professional teachers.
- The participants perceived experiential course as a training ground in preparing for the teaching profession.
- Various enrichment activities should be incorporated in the experiential courses of the pre-service teachers as supplements in their preparation as future-ready workforces.

Based from the derived conclusions, the following recommendations are forwarded:

- The experiential courses should be continuously enriched for the next batch of pre-service teachers.
- Further study should be conducted in other teacher education programs in the campus e.g. BPED, BEED, BCAEd to validate the findings of the study.

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