

Pre-Service Teachers' Online Demo Experiences: Challenges and Opportunities

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Abstract

Shifting to online learning and teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic appeared to be an astute option. This qualitative study, using conventional content analysis, describes the experiences of pre-service teachers (PSTs) who teach English as a second language (ESL) in the Philippines and have undertaken online demo teaching from 2020-2022. It outlines the challenges and opportunities that emerged from online field demo experiences. Regarding challenges, four themes emerged: the internet bandwidth, technical skills and awareness, lack of technical equipment and interaction in the online environment. The analysis also unlocked two opportunities: ICT upskilling and collaboration in online teaching with peers (co-PSTs) and supervisors (cooperating teachers). With the shift to non-face-to-face classes, ICT became a boon and bane for the PSTs, which prompts this study to recommend requiring PSTs to submit ICT-integrated outputs and review for an ICT-infused curriculum.

Keywords: Covid Challenges, Distance Training, Online Demonstration, Pre-Service Teachers

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Introduction

Owing to the COVID-19 pandemic in early 2020, the Philippines, as in other nations, has shifted to online learning and teaching. Schools have been closed to curb the spread of the coronavirus (Bozkurt & Sharma, 2020). Talosa, Javier and Dirain (2021) underscored that Philippine higher education, owing to the pandemic, resorted to alternative learning modalities from conventional to flexible teaching and learning. Cagayan State University (CagSU), like other academic institutions, is tossed between instantaneous realities and needs against premeditated financial development contexts. Geared towards quality education, inventive research, extension and production among students, CagSU recently launched a Learning Environment Network System (LENS) system to allow students to learn flexibly. Replacing some with an e-learning milieu for self-study, which includes various instruction tools, reduces classroom learning time. With Covid impeding physical movements, teaching internship programs in the course of teacher education across the country have also shifted to an online environment to minimize the potential risks of exposure of the student-teachers to the emerging disease and to cope with the trend of education.

A teaching internship program, a key component of any teacher education program, provides in-training teachers with hands-on teaching experiences, assessment, and community involvement. This pre-service training aims to practice teaching and be ready for it when they actually serve as ESL pre-service teachers. During this practicum stage, they learn how to plan lessons and manage classrooms with the collaboration of a more experienced teacher (Cobb et al., 2018; Selcuk & Yontem, 2019). Hence, the internship experience is significant to their career and professional growth. It provides better opportunities for PSTs to have hands-on experience in their future profession as they carry out the duties and demands of a teacher.

Given the quarantine during the coronavirus, The Commission on Higher Education (CHED) issued guidelines on distance online practicum covering pre-service who underwent experiential learning courses, including practice teaching stipulated on the "Revised Policies and Standards for Undergraduate Teacher Education Curriculum" issued by CHED under Memorandum Order #30, s. 2004 and those taking professional education certification or education courses equivalent to 30 units. In teaching internships and field study delivery, TEIs are enjoined to execute essential modifications regarding the availability of resources. However, knowledge transfer must employ varied learning modalities and coach and mentor aligned with the Learning Continuity Plan (LCP) and Most Essential Learning Competencies (MELCs).

Studying pre-service teachers' experiences during their online field demonstration teaching is important. In line with teacher education, an e-internship would be best defined as the virtual teaching environment of the PSTs during their online field demonstration teaching. Given these points, this study explored the challenges and opportunities of online field demonstration experiences from the perspective of the pre-service ESL teachers at Cagayan State University-Aparri, Cagayan, as a basis for recommendations.

Research Questions

The study sought to analyze the challenges and opportunities encountered in the online field demo experiences among pre-service ESL teachers of Cagayan State University-Aparri based on the following questions:

1. What were the challenges that pre-service ESL teachers underwent during the online field demonstration?
2. What opportunities did they have contributing to their online field demonstration experience?

Method

This qualitative study adopted an inductive approach, using a conventional content analysis of students' written reports and subjective interpretation of text data content through the systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes or patterns. Content analysis can be used on all types of written texts, regardless of how research data is collected. This analysis contributes significantly to a deeper understanding of human perceptions and experiences. The study was conducted at the College of Teacher Education of Cagayan State University at the Aparri campus situated at Maura, Aparri, Cagayan. The campus for the current school year adopted the Learning Environment Network System (LENS), a Moodle-based platform for online teaching and delivery.

Research Design

Following Talosa et al. (2021), the study utilized qualitative research design using mainly a phenomenology analysis. This design best fits the aim of determining and identifying the challenges and opportunities of an online field demonstration of pre-service ESL teachers. It is suitable for describing the phenomena and focuses on subjective experiences and understanding the structure of those lived experiences.

Participants

Pre-service teachers of field study courses were invited to join as participants. Moreover, the PSTs are students taking up the Bachelor of Secondary Education major in English. Invitations to participate in the study were sent via G-mail and personal messages to the different respondents invited from 34 target respondents; only 17 ESL pre-service teachers consented to their voluntary involvement.

Instrument

Data were collected using the online form via google form to minimize potential risks, and to maintain a higher degree of confidentiality. Due to the anonymity of participants, the form included an encrypted ID code (a combination of letters and numbers). In order to minimize the biases of researchers and participants, and to maintain neutrality, researchers were not otherwise directly involved in working with participants, and any suggestions from researchers were avoided.

The questions are formulated in a manner that allows the participant to feel accepted, no matter what the answer is. Following Bengtsson, non-suggestible, open-ended written questions were used to further encourage students to express their thoughts. Writing time and amount of text were not limited. Open-ended written questions provide students with freedom of writing, a secure flow of thoughts, and a detailed description of their perceptions and experiences, which cannot be achieved using structured questionnaires with preconceived questions and provided answers. Written form of expression is more appropriate than oral. It reduces anxiety and gives respondents more time to think and respond, which further reduces the possibility of wrong answers. For this reason, students were asked to describe the challenges they encountered during the online teaching and opportunities brought by this demonstration Teaching.

Data Analysis

The open-ended written questions method directly influenced the depth of analysis and determined the approach manifested in this study. The four researchers in this study performed the procedures called open coding. They freely and inductively generated codes, sub-categories and generic as well as main categories following the steps of Elo and Kyngas (2008). This helped in minimizing the effect of diverse conclusions drawn by multiple

researchers based on varied data. Further, Elo and Kyngas stated that at least two people are needed to analyze and encode data distinctly to reach a definitive organization of data to arrive at a common consensus after completing individual data analysis. A model of inductive thematic data saturation focusing on codes/themes identification was used in consonance with the research questions and analytic framework.

Results

The findings are arranged around the challenges and opportunities of ESL student-teachers in the new teaching internship. The success of the online demonstration teaching and learning process has heavily relied on the internet bandwidth, technological skills and time management of both the teacher and the learners, given that this happens in homebound learning.

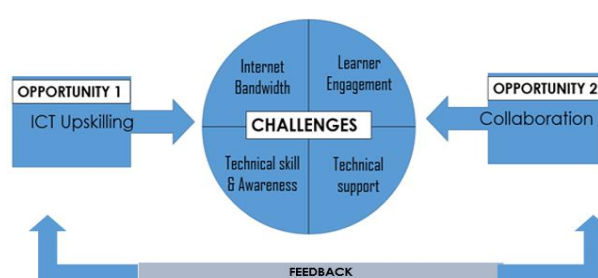


Figure 1. Thematic Analysis of the Challenges and Opportunities of Pre-Service Teachers

Part 1: Challenges of Online Teaching Demonstration

Four themes emerged from the analysis. These themes are (a) Internet bandwidth, (b) Technical skills and awareness, (c) lack of technical equipment and (d) learner's engagement.

Internet Bandwidth

Internet bandwidth heavily relies on the speed of the internet connection. If the connection is slow, the transfer of information from the teacher to the learners in an online setting is slow, and vice versa. High-speed internet connection and bandwidth have had a significant role in the success of online learning.

Tolosa et al. (2021) have revealed the crucial role of high-speed internet connection in developing the knowledge and understanding of students in online classes. The study highlighted the significant effect of high bandwidth internet connection on more chances of synergy for knowledge construction in online classes.

According to Social Weather Stations Survey published in the Manila-Philippines bulletin, thirty-one percent of Filipino families with members studying online distance learning have an unstable internet connection. The same case in the catered information of this study that the responses had dealt with major problems in the internet connection during their online teaching demonstration.

The same experience of poor internet bandwidth that caused unproductive and inefficient teaching and learning experience in the virtual environment was detailed in the following responses;

According to S17, "One of the challenges I have encountered is on the stability of internet connection", which has also been emphasized in the response of S3 and S4.

According to S3, *"The challenge we have encountered is that when it comes to online field observation, a small number of students can join the virtual class due to an unstable network."* S4. *"Some students find it hard to participate in the activities. Also, the internet connection is not stable."*-S4. The participants revealed the significance of Internet bandwidth to learners' learning acquisition and engagement in a virtual learning environment. This finding on the challenges of online field demonstration teaching contradicted the online instruction's promise, such as student's weariless access, teaching-learning flexible approaches, and enriched educational opportunities (Rovai, Ponton, Weighting, & Baker, 2007).

Technical Skills and Awareness

Among the 17 participants, the root of their difficulties revolves around technical issues. S1, S4, S11, and S12 shared how technical issues become one of the sources of challenges in virtual demonstration teaching. Technical skills and awareness include the pre-service teachers' ability to utilize various online educational tools and equipment to implement lessons in a virtual environment.

In the HEIs context, digital transformation can be viewed as the synopsis of all digital processes vital to achieving the transformation process, further providing tertiary institutions the perspectives to positively and optimally apply digital technologies (Kopp et al.). This entails sufficient strategic preparation, building trust, thinking in processes, amalgamation and reinforcement of all parties involved, and separate, collaborative and organizational knowledge (Cameron & Green, 2019). However, since ESL Pre-Service Teachers are a novice in online demonstration teaching, they need to be more capable of the various technical skills to deliver instruction competently in the new normal setting. Hiltz and Turoff (2005) argued that using an objectivist teaching method focused on teacher-centered, contemporary transformation has moved face-to-face instructional programs to online and hybrid programs applying digital technologies in enhancing learner-centered and cooperative pedagogy.

Researchers of this study said that online learning is a novel social process gaining force as the alternative to the usual face-to-face classroom but viewed from the perspective of replacement processes that have been branded as disruptive processes, that both the teachers and the learners are not technically competent to the tools and equipment in a virtual learning environment.

Lack of Technical Equipment

Respondents of the study also stated that technical support as one of the challenges in virtual demonstration teaching. Considering this happens in a virtual environment, there is a demand for technical equipment such as laptops, tablets, smartphones and Internet connection to implement virtual demonstration successfully. According to S13, along with S11 and S7, when enquired about challenges they encountered in the online teaching demonstration, they unfold the lack of technical equipment and learning materials in a virtual setting. According to S13, aside from experiencing an unstable internet connection, another constraint he/she experiences is the lack of learning materials and equipment. The same reports came from S11 and S7 discussing their struggles in coping with the lack of technical equipment.

The pandemic bridged bigger gaps in education between rich and poor students (Bailey, Duncan, Murnane, & Au Yeung, 2021) as rich students have better and greater opportunities for the tools necessary for learning online than the poor resulting in some not attending online class, at some point; the internet data is quite expensive (Ferri et. al., 2020).

Hence, this will challenge teachers to reach all students who are unable to meet them in person due to the pandemic.

Interaction in Online Environment

To cultivate pedagogical competence, engagement is critical (Rospigliosi, 2020), the absence of in-person interaction between PSTs and students obfuscates the PSTs propensity to develop automaticity in sustaining interaction with learners. The lack of an unrelenting interface has tainted their confidence in teaching, which is critical in increasing pedagogical competence. Since the PSTs were also affected materially by the lack of suitable equipment, their attention to focus on essential teaching-related activities is divided (Adedoyin & Sokyan, 2020; Donitsa-Schmidt & Ramot, 2020).

According to S3, when asked about his/her challenges in online teaching demonstration, he/she shared that *"it is challenging to encourage students to share their thoughts"*, S4 and S7 also had experienced a lack of interactive teaching and learning procedure in the online platform. According to S4, *"there are small number of students who can join virtual class"*, this may be due to the insufficiency of internet Mbps and lack of technical equipment and tools to use in online procedures. S7 also highlighted the lack of learners' engagement in his/her class because, according to him/her *"having a slow net connection, some students are not able to join our meeting"*, one reason as to lack of interactive learning sessions in online procedure have been due to the lack of learner's confidence and materials, he/she added.

From this, the researchers concluded that technical equipment and bandwidth could be considered variables that could determine interactive online procedures. The accessibility of these materials to the learners can create interactive online learning procedures and vice versa.

Part 2: Opportunities of Online Demonstration Teaching

ICT Upskilling

ESL teachers have determined one appeal of online teaching demonstrations, such as technical skill enhancement. The following responses came from S7, S12 and S17. According to S12, when asked about the opportunity brought by the online field demo experiences he/she answered that *"I was nurtured in exploring ICT tools which I've use and practice it in order to master it during demonstration"*, this had also been emphasized when S7 said that the online field demo teaching, *"allows me to be more technologically competent"* since they are heavily relying to the information and communication technology their exposure is a great experience to make them competent ICT users which is also visible to the answer of S17 which is *"online field demo teaching experiences gave me opportunities to hone more of my skills in the use of technology. I have come to explore different applications that would suit my crafted assessments and not only to use the usual google meet"*

These are some of the responses collected from the study participants, which displayed the opportunities offered in online teaching demonstrations. Some ESL student-teachers have developed and enhanced computer literacy, agreeing with the published work of (Sullivan, 2002; Cauble & Thurston, 2000; Walker, 2005) that online classes have positively impacted computer skills.

Since ESL student-teachers are on online teaching internship, they are most likely to use technological tools and equipment as the mode of instructional delivery. Given that remote learning requires technological skills ESL student-teachers are forced to exert extra effort to equip themselves with the necessary skills to become competent teachers in a

digital mode of learning and also to deliver instruction excellently to have productive learning even amid a pandemic.

According to S12, when asked about the opportunity in online field demo teaching, he/she answered, *"It allowed me to experience new things that I can use in the teaching field"*. This experience includes the new venture on the different online tools useful in online teaching procedures to create interactive virtual environments. Identical to the opportunity embraced by S12, S13 also shared the same opportunity, according to him/her, online field demo teaching helps him/her to, *"Venture on wider, new and innovative teaching experiences for my career and professional development"*. The same opportunity had been emphasized through the response of S6; *"I became flexible in using the online learning application class point. It does give me the strength to be more confident because finally my learners are engaged to answer in the activities I prepared"*.

These sample responses from the participants evinced that online demonstration teaching is capable of enhancing the flexibility of ESL student-teachers. Flexibility in this scene is defined as the ability of the ESL student-teachers to cope with the needs of their learners, such as enhancing their technological skills and teaching methodology to fit the demands of educational trends as well as with the needs of the digital learners. They are flexible in terms of learning new things in remote learning, exploring new and interactive educational applications such as google classroom, pear deck, class point, etc. With this, it transformed conventional classrooms to online, which mandate readiness from technical infrastructure and human usage perspective (Saqib et al., 2022).

Collaboration

Identical to the traditional internship programs, online field internships are also steered and supervised by experienced teachers. Since PSTs are accompanied by their supervisor (resource teacher/cooperating teacher) during their online demonstration teaching, learning opportunities provide the needed coaching and mentoring that PSTs need to handle queries from their students (Cobb et al., 2018; Selcuk & Yontem, 2019).

Collaboration has been seen as one relevant opportunity in online field demo experiences of the ESL pre-service teacher because through the guidance and feedback of their resource teacher and the support from their peers (co-PSTs) they find the motivation to continue striving and moving towards the fulfillment of the internship program.

In an interview held in private conversation with the respondents, S7 and S8 expressed the importance of having a good bond between peers and cooperating teachers to become effective teachers in an online environment.

"I felt very comfortable, and I can express myself in my full potential being with them. Having a good and strong relationship with my peers and cooperating teachers is very important as they affect my learning process while deployed in our field study"; s7.

The response could portray the significant role of peers and cooperating teachers in creating confidence and motivation for the PST to effectively deliver instruction in online learning. He also added that"

My self-confidence and esteem are triggered and affected. I was not afraid to commit mistakes and errors in teaching because my cooperating teacher is kind, understanding and very approachable. He corrected me in a nice way that helped me to understand and accept it with my heart and all the things I see are positive impact".

This has further emphasized the importance of collaboration in shaping desirable skills and competencies to future educators which has also been pointed out through the response of S8. According to her, *"I found my kindred spirit in them wherein I ignited my knowledge, skills and attitude to perform the best way I could with the guidance of*

Almighty as well." Indeed, collaboration has had a significant effect to the teaching performance of PSTs even in an online environment. *"I felt like I can do all because a qualified mentor supervises me"*

A good relationship between the PSTs with the peers and cooperating teacher is one good indicator that portrays collaboration during the internship course.

"I found my kindred spirit in them wherein I ignited my knowledge, skills and attitude to perform the best way I can with the guidance of the Almighty." S8

"I can work with them, and I always seek help and advice for my tasks and work to improve and learn. Every feedback given was noted and applied for my next virtual teaching. Based on his comment, he was really happy that I applied and did all the comments, advice and improvements he wanted to see." S7

We have closures, she has genuine character that is worth Emulating and always mentored me when it comes to techniques and tools for teaching as a way to mold me and become an effective teacher. She also provides feedback which helps me to improve my teaching pedagogy." S5

A good mentorship through guidance and feedback has significantly affected the professional development of the PSTs even amidst the new normal setting of education. This was made evident by the following responses.

"We were warmly welcomed during our first day, and their treatment towards us was consistent until our last day. We had great bonds as if we have known each other for so long." S11

"My cooperating teacher served as my mother figure inside the school. We had a good relationship since she was willing to help me all throughout." S13

"Regardless that the teachers had their respective FS students, they were still reaching out to us in any way they could mentor and help us improve. Of course, there is always room for improvement, and they were very verbal to the key points we need to enhance and improve more." S2

"All the mentorships and conduciveness of the school environment have contributed to our online teaching performance. Without their usual support and words of knowledge and wisdom, we could not have obtained what we were anticipating to achieve." S15

"My self-confidence and self-esteem are triggered and affected, I was not afraid to commit mistakes or errors in teaching because my cooperating teacher is kind, understanding and very approachable, he corrected me in a nice way that helped me to really understand and accept it with my heart and all the things I see were positive impact." S7

In a similar spirit, platforms' collaborative nature like Google Docs or Zoom meeting rooms allowed users to learn on their own during their experience. Furthermore, despite the restricted possibilities for engagement, the PSTs and their supervisors were able to maximize learning through learners' initiative who ask questions, seek clarifications and request help. These examples demonstrate the collaborative aspect of online teaching (Donitsa-Schmidt & Ramot, 2020), in which all players (teachers, PSTs, and students) negotiate to learn inputs actively.

Collaboration was not only reflected with PSTs and their cooperating teachers, but also from pre-service-to-pre-service teachers. Help-seeking, reaching out were evident to provide collaborative support among the PST's peers. *"During the preparation of the field demo, I was anxious. My peer and I simulating a student-teacher virtual demo would log in together to prepare ourselves for the actual demo, and the collaboration adds to the overall experience."*

Implications

The opportunities encountered in online field demonstration experiences of ESL teachers have significantly impacted the career development of PSTs. They can enhance quality education in online teaching and learning procedure. ICT in education paves new ways of learning among learners and teachers. The significant effect of ICT upskilling in the lives of pre-service teachers is that it serves as their weapon in delivering quality education in the new normal setting since the platform's success heavily relies on the technical skills of both the teacher and the learners. Therefore, the College of Teacher Education may consider the results of these findings in crafting specific policies to instigate a higher technology use to upskill its would-be teachers through practice and infrastructure developments.

Given the barriers of PSTs deployment in the field due to COVID-19, experiences along virtual practicum offer new possibilities, outdoing hurdles and offering future teachers' chances to practice meeting the needs of students in the classroom walls and beyond. Therefore, an intentional balance of learning teaching's art and content-area skills and applying them in authentic, field-based contexts is a pre-requisite in their preparation. Providing webinars and observations in virtual classes may be offered further to improve pre-service teachers' confidence in actual distance practice.

Conclusion

The online field demonstration teaching experiences resulted in unprecedented challenges in the internship of the pre-service ESL teachers. Internet bandwidth has a major role in the success of online teaching and learning procedures. Institutions should invest in improving institutional network infrastructure when navigating the post-pandemic for online field demonstration among PSTs. Curricular Integrations in the technology education courses programs may consider the presentation and performance training of the different interactive software and applications as technical skills and awareness, technical support and interaction in an online environment appear to be relevant challenges for the PSTs in delivering instructions via an online environment. In line with this, partnership is expected in the institution in the cooperating schools for a more-engaged preparation of teacher education students. Collaboration opportunities for pre-service and in-service teachers and program coordinators could be conducted by steering open scheduled sharing. Similar research may also strengthen results further, if not refute them.

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We (the authors of this paper) hereby declare that research ethics and citing principles have been considered in all the stages of this paper. We take full responsibility for the content of the paper in case of dispute.

Conflict of interest:

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