

I Listen Therefore I Become: Evaluating the Strengths and Weaknesses of Pre- Service Teachers as A Basis for Pre-Service Training Program

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to identify the weaknesses of pre-service teachers and turn them into strengths in the BECEd program at DMMMSU MLUC LES. A qualitative method was used in this study, and data were collected through a one-on-one interview guide administered to target participants. The findings of this study are as follows: (1) The pre-service teachers had strengths, which are: the lesson planning and preparation; classroom management and rule implementation; responsiveness to feedback and reflective practice; confidence and communication skills; and lastly, creativity and innovation in teaching. (2) The pre-service teachers had weaknesses, which are: when planning becomes the problem; disorder in environments, untapped potential; time passes, dedication diminished; calm plans, stormy nerves; and lastly, no first move, no progress achieved. (3) The training design can be proposed to address the weaknesses of pre-service teachers, which include: classroom management, lesson planning mastery, confidence-building, stress management, professionalism training, teaching strategies and methods, and lastly professionalism and work ethics. These results necessitate training that targets the weaknesses of pre-service teachers. The study used thematic analysis, specifically the Braun and Clarke (2006) method, to examine pre-service teachers' strengths and weaknesses. Braun and Clarke Method (2006) described thematic analysis as a technique for recognizing, examining, and presenting patterns (themes) found within qualitative data. It provides a versatile, straightforward method for assessing significance across a dataset. Data were collected through interviews using a researcher-developed interview guide.

Keywords: Pre-service Teachers, Strengths, Weaknesses, Training Program

INTRODUCTION

One of the key skills for advancing professionally in teacher education is attentive listening. As pre-service teachers bring varying strengths and weaknesses shaped by their education, personalities, and experiences (Allen et al., 2024). Cultivating the ability to listen selflessly equips them to navigate complex classroom interactions and make ethical decisions that prioritize student welfare and fairness. The phrase 'I listen, therefore I become' captures how reflection enables them to evolve from beginners to proficient educators.

To develop effective training programs for pre-service teachers, it is essential to use established methods. Sims et al. (2025) introduced a theory comprising four key elements: gaining insight, encouraging transformation, teaching skills, and engaging in regular practice. Their findings indicated that training yields the best results when it includes opportunities for reflection and constructive feedback, both of which depend on effective listening. By identifying pre-service teachers' strengths and challenges through discussions, observations, and self-assessment, trainers can design programs that support each teacher's individual growth, aligning with Vygotsky's advocacy for learning through scaffolding and reflection.

Teacher education programs must be adaptable to meet local needs and easy to apply across different contexts. They emphasized cooperative support, collective learning experiences, and various feedback methods based on

active listening and collaboration. Listening was not only a valuable skill but also a pedagogical approach that enabled pre-service teachers to assess their practices, address students' needs, and cultivate professional values. By reflecting on their strengths and areas for improvement, teacher training programs can design curricula that prepare future educators to become skilled, introspective, and compassionate professionals. This method was supported by Ferreira (2021), who proposed a continuous training framework that incorporated teachers' well-being, social and emotional skills, and reflective teaching as crucial elements of professional development and educators' overall growth.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Teachers are the most important people to influence the educational outcome of any nation. Worldwide, high-quality teacher preparation is recognized as a cornerstone of quality education. However, in Tanzania, the issue of poor-quality teacher preparation and preparedness in schools had been an issue of concern for a long time. Designing of a lesson plan was highlighted as one of concerns by Mpate, Campbell-Evans, and Gray (2023). Planning of the lesson was a highly challenging issue especially among the pre-service teachers who were likely to struggle in coming up with sound assessments, mostly because of lack of exposure, understanding of assessment means, and failure to relate assessment to the learning outcomes. The unavailability of guidelines to help the pre-service teachers create comprehensive lesson plans also complicated this problem, so many pre-service teacher could not create properly structured plans. (Achmad et al., 2023; Nurkhamidah, 2023; Oktafiyani et al., 2021).

Similarly challenges are evident in the Philippines, particularly among student teachers in urban areas such as Metro Manila and Cebu, these pre-service teachers are usually facing problems not only in preparing lesson plans but also the adoption of teaching strategies within the classroom. Common struggled include setting clear learning objectives, organizing classroom activities effectively, and managing time during lesson preparation (Ferrer, 2021; Collantes, 2021). These challenges showed that teacher education programs needed to strengthen their support by providing student teachers with more practical experience, closer guidance, and opportunities to practice their skills. Addressing these areas can help future teachers build confidence, preparedness, and effectiveness as they transition into professional practice.

At DMMMSU Mid-La Union Campus, the researchers conducted their study to investigate whether the problem among the first batch of BECED pre-service teachers who graduated this year was still the same with the second batch regarding their experienced difficulty in designing lesson plans and applying teaching strategies. Specifically, determining whether pre-service teachers applied the theoretical knowledge they had gained when student teachers were in their 1st and 3rd years, and whether they effectively applied it in practical situations during their pre-service training. The pre-service teachers had problems implementing instructional strategies, establishing precise learning goals, and organizing the classroom. The results have shown that pre-service teachers still had issues with the implementation of teaching strategies, establishing clear goals, and planning classroom processes. At this point, these issues highlighted the need to receive guidance and feedback on what cooperating teachers can offer, that would help pre-service teachers to develop effective lessons and enhance their overall performance.

Framework

The study is built on five foundational educational theories: constructivist learning, experiential learning, active listening, self-efficacy, and reflective practice. These theories offered distinct perspectives on pre-service teachers' experiences, challenges, and growth, particularly with respect to feedback, classroom interaction, and professional development. Together, they served as a guiding structure to help the researchers address their objectives and research questions.

Constructivist Learning Theory. According to Jean Piaget (1973) and Lev Vygotsky (1978), people actively construct new knowledge from their pre-existing understanding as they learn. Listening to pre-service teachers involves more than passive reception. It entails active participation in peer interactions, classroom experiences, and feedback. Growth happens when students in these examples, aspiring teachers, are assisted by mentors or cooperating teachers in overcoming new obstacles, according to Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development.

Experiential Learning Theory. Kolb (1984) defined learning as a four-part progression that contains hands-on experiences, reflective observation, and theoretical thinking. During practice teaching, pre-service teachers go through the following stages: concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation. Feedback listening is a component of the Reflective Observation stage, which informs training program design by identifying deficiencies and reinforcing positives.

Active Listening Theory. According to the active listening theory of Rogers & Farson (1957), listening should be done with the goal of understanding rather than merely reacting. It requires focus, introspection, and elucidation. Actively listening to mentors' and students' criticism is a crucial skill for pre-service teachers as it promotes accurate self-evaluation and professional development.

Self-efficacy theory. Bandura's (1997) self-efficacy is the belief in one's ability to perform particular activities successfully. Teachers who believe in their own abilities are more self-assured, flexible, and tenacious. A greater sense of professional competence is developed by taking constructive criticism seriously, admitting one's shortcomings, and working to strengthen them.

Reflective Practice Theory. Learning from one's teaching experiences and ongoing self-evaluation are key components of reflective practice. Thinking during teaching is known as reflection-in-action, and thinking after teaching is known as reflection-on-action, according to Schön (1983). Both types of reflection require teachers to listen to feedback to refine their methods.

METHODS

Research Design

The researcher used a qualitative descriptive research design to reveal pre-service teachers' perceptions of their teaching practice course. Qualitative descriptive design is a research approach that focuses on describing data in rich detail without necessarily interpreting or theorizing about it. This design is appropriate because it provides a straightforward description and understanding of participants' experiences without moving far from the data itself. It enables researchers to deeply comprehend and explore diverse perspectives, as data are varied and detailed (Liwanag, 2023). The study aimed to explore and analyze the strengths and weaknesses of pre-service teachers and to understand the significance of these experiences. Qualitative research explores real-world problems and offers greater insights, according to Tenny et al. (2022).

Settings And Participants

For this study, the participants were pre-service teachers enrolled in the Bachelor of Early Childhood Education program at Don Mariano Marcos Memorial State University, Mid La Union Campus. They were selected via criterion sampling because the study focused solely on those involved in pre-service teaching. This was participated in by 10 pre-service teachers, 6 cooperating teachers, and 3 administrators. Participants were selected through criterion sampling that allowed the researcher to intentionally select individuals with specific characteristics relevant to the study. Criterion sampling was utilized to ensure that only those meeting the established inclusion criteria were included (Moser & Korstjens, 2018). The criteria for choosing pre-service teachers are as follows: (1) must be enrolled in the Bachelor of Early Childhood Education (BECED) program, (2) must be engaged in campus practice teaching at the Laboratory Elementary School, and (3) must be a fourth-year student actively engaged in practicum.

On the other hand, the study also incorporated cooperating teachers and administrators. The criteria for choosing cooperating teachers are as follows: (1) must have a minimum of three years of teaching experience, (2) must have already observed at least three demonstration lessons conducted by pre-service students, and (3) must be a mentor of pre-service teachers under the BECED program. The criteria for choosing administrators are as follows: (1) must have at least five years of experience in teacher education or academic leadership, (2) must have obtained a master's or doctoral degree in education, curriculum development, or related fields, and (3) must hold a position as a Dean, Program Chair, or Education Supervisor within the College of Education or a related department.

Instrument

The primary data collection tool in this study was a semi-structured interview guide. It included a mix of predetermined questions and adaptable prompts that enabled participants to elaborate on their experiences, opinions, and insights. This structure ensured uniformity across interviews while providing a deep qualitative understanding of participants' strengths and areas for improvement in listening and communication, crucial indicators for shaping their professional development needs. The semi-structured interview was validated by 5 experts: two (2) supervising teachers, two (2) cooperating teachers, and one (1) principal from the Laboratory Elementary School of Don Mariano Marcos Memorial State University-Mid La Union Campus in Catbangen, San Fernando City, La Union.

Data Analysis

The study used thematic analysis, specifically the method described by Braun and Clarke (2006), to examine pre-service teachers' strengths and weaknesses. Braun and Clarke (2006) described thematic analysis as a technique for identifying, analyzing, and presenting patterns (themes) in qualitative data. It provides a versatile, straightforward method for assessing significance across a dataset.

Ethical Considerations

This study was submitted to the DMMMSU Research Ethics Committee for ethical clearance. The researchers were issued a certificate from the DMMMSU Research Ethics Committee, along with a code serving as proof that the study has undergone ethical review. The researchers assured all participants that data collection was conducted with respect for privacy and confidentiality and that the information gathered was used solely for research purposes. Confidentiality was a priority throughout the research process. Participants' identities and responses were protected and kept strictly confidential.

RESULTS

The findings revealed that pre-service teachers demonstrated significant strengths in lesson planning and preparation, classroom management, responsiveness to feedback, confidence in communication, and creativity in teaching. As one participant reflected, *"One of my strengths was my ability to capture the children's attention by using strategies such as giving rewards or prize. Another strength was my ability to adapt to negative feedback from my cooperating teacher. I used it as motivation to improve for the next demonstration."* Similarly, a cooperating teacher observed, *"They really listened to what I told them. If I advised them to correct something, they corrected it immediately."* These accounts highlight how feedback and adaptability contribute to professional growth. This aligns with Weir, Al-Malki, and Usher (2020), who emphasized that timely feedback enables pre-service teachers to implement positive changes and avoid reinforcing errors. For example, the fact that they plan their lessons and manage their classrooms reflects underlying professional preparedness. In contrast, their sensitivity to feedback and reflective practice suggests their capacity to pursue continuous improvement. Their presence in the school is further promoted by confidence and communication skills, and taught by adaptive and engaging instruction, which is enhanced by creativity.

Conversely, weaknesses emerged in areas such as overly complicated lesson planning, failure to establish classroom order, difficulties with long-term commitment, anxiety during implementation, and reluctance to initiate tasks. These issues highlight the transitional nature of pre-service teachers' development. As one participant shared, *"After the practicum, I'm still struggling with classroom management, no matter what I do. It's really hard to get the children's attention."* These responses clearly show that practice teachers need guidance from cooperating teachers when it comes to managing the classroom. They really need to apply the advice of their cooperating teachers because this will help them enhance in terms of dealing with classroom management. As Ozkanal (2023) emphasized, cooperating teachers' strategies and modeling are crucial in helping pre-service teachers regulate emotions, gain confidence, and apply their skills more consistently. In this stage, pre-service teachers may possess new skills but struggle to activate them consistently, regulate their

emotions, and make proactive decisions. Notably, these areas of weakness are not inborn deficits but developmental setbacks that, through systematic training and mentorship, can be transformed into strengths.

Based on the findings, which demonstrated both strengths and weaknesses of pre-service teachers, a training program was developed that particularly focused on the points of weaknesses. The training will be implemented in a face-to-face manner with the pre-service teachers so that direct interaction can be provided as well as instant feedback and practical work. The program will be five consecutive days of intensive training and each day will have specific developmental outcomes like mastering classroom management, mastering lesson planning, building confidence and managing stress, teaching strategies, and professionalism. This will be implemented through interactive lectures facilitated by mentors. The assessment will be done in form of short quizzes, which will be based on knowledge and will determine how well the pre-service teachers have understood the lectures. This ensures that the training program will directly tackle the weaknesses discussed in the findings and will give a chance to grow and develop professionally.

DISCUSSION

The findings are consistent with Self-Efficacy Theory (Bandura, 1997), suggesting that pre-service teachers' belief in their ability to teach is strengthened through effective lesson planning and preparation. Nevertheless, when the planning process is hectic, it negatively affects self-efficacy, underscoring the fine line between planning and confidence. Such a duality underscores the need for training that makes planning processes both simple and rigorous.

Similarly, the findings are echoed by Reflective Practice Theory (Schön, 1983), since the responsiveness of pre-service teachers to feedback is reflective engagement. However, their experiments with maintaining commitment and controlling anxiety demonstrate the absence of reflection practice, which makes the mentorship organized and designed to develop a sense of resilience and emotional control.

Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory (1984) also elaborates on the learning cycles of pre-service teachers, which are based on practice, reflection, and adjustment. The fact that they can incorporate the feedback into subsequent teaching is an example of experiential learning in practice. Deficiencies, such as reluctance to take initiative, however, suggest limited involvement in the active experimentation phase and indicate the need for opportunities that promote risk-taking and independent decision-making.

Lastly, the Constructivist Learning Theory (1973) emphasizes active participation. Creativity and communication strengths indicate that pre-service teachers can be successful when they are involved in interactive teacher activities. In contrast, classroom disorganization and a lack of initiative are weaknesses, suggesting that these teachers should be offered more scaffold opportunities to fully develop their professional identity.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the findings of the study, the following conclusions are made:

1. Pre-service teachers already have some good skills, like planning lessons, managing a classroom, being open to feedback, being confident, and communicating clearly. These talents can help them grow professionally. Teacher training programs should build on these abilities to help teachers improve their practice and become effective, professional teachers.
2. Pre-service teachers face significant gaps in lesson planning, classroom management, and time management due to inadequate teacher education programs. The solution is to provide more targeted support. Challenges in controlling classroom environments indicate that students' participation and learning outcomes can suffer without intervention; therefore, interventions should emphasize practical strategies, simulations (e.g., supervised learning), and mentorship. This deficiency in coordinating lessons with learning objectives requires more rigorous training in curriculum design and instructional alignment. In addition to technical skill development, teacher preparation should emphasize resilience, adaptability, and reflective practice so that pre-

service teachers can perform effectively across diverse classroom settings despite time-management challenges. Moreover, some studies suggest that teaching environments may not be as effective as expected due to unacknowledged resources.

3. A well-designed training program is necessary to prepare pre-service teachers for their future careers as educators. It enhances classroom management, lesson planning, confidence-building techniques, teaching tactics, and professionalism. Improves student performance by enhancing learning outcomes, resulting in a better-prepared student body and more effective teaching staff. At the policy level, it stresses the need for comprehensive, institutionally accurate training programs and emphasizes ongoing support and improvement of teacher education programs.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the results and conclusions of the study, the following recommendations are made:

1. Pre-service teachers should continue practicing lesson planning and preparing materials with guidance from their mentors. They should also receive training in classroom management to create a positive learning environment. Feedback from their mentors helps them improve further. Building confidence activities will help them speak clearly and connect better with their pupils. They should be encouraged to use creative, engaging teaching methods to make their pupils' discussions enjoyable.

2. Pre-service teachers should have training in lesson planning so that they can better connect to their learning goals. They also need to consider classroom management strategies to create a positive learning environment. They should possess time-management skills to use their time effectively. To enable pre-service teachers to function effectively across a variety of classroom environments, teacher education programs should also place strong emphasis on resilience, adaptability, and reflective practice. To provide focused assistance and bridge the gap between theory and practice, practical strategies such as mentorship, supervised instruction, and simulations should be incorporated.

3. As mentioned in the conclusion, in order to create a well-designed training design, institutions and legislators should make a structured education framework for teachers that includes management of the classroom, lesson planning, techniques that help in building confidence, teaching strategies, and professionalism as important components. These programs must be regularly evaluated and improved to ensure applicability and accuracy at the instructional level. To further enhance pre-service teachers' readiness, support mechanisms should be continuous, including professional development, workshops, and opportunities for reflective practice. This encompassing strategy will improve student learning outcomes, increase the effectiveness of individual teachers, and help develop a more competent and professional teaching workforce.

4. Future researchers should look more closely at the areas where pre-service teachers need support. They can assess the effectiveness of the proposed training design by implementing it in an actual practicum setting. It would also be useful to explore how building confidence affects their performance. Researchers may examine how feedback from their mentors and reflection practices guide their growth, and how professionalism and work ethic are developed during their training. They can also look at the long-term effects of these skills once pre-service teachers become full-time teachers. By focusing on these areas, future studies can generate additional ideas for strengthening and improving teacher training programs.

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