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Difficulties in Field-Based Observation among Pre-Service Teachers: Implications to Practice Teaching

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ABSTRACT

Field-based observation has long been a central part of pre-service teacher education in many countries and is crucial for implementing effective practicum of pre-service teachers. This paper focused on the perspectives of graduating pre-service teachers regarding their difficulties related to administrative support, cooperating teachers, student supervisors, students, peers, assigned tasks and learning environment during their 17-hour field observation in selected private and public secondary schools. An explanatory sequential mixed-methods research design was adopted utilizing survey questionnaire, Focus Group Interviews, and Key Informant Interview. Quantitative data were obtained from 136 sample respondents through stratified random sampling using proportionate allocation while qualitative data were gathered from 10 pre-service teachers, 10 cooperating teachers, six student supervisors and two school principals who were chosen purposively. Results of descriptive statistical analysis served as basis for the design of qualitative interview and focus group schedules which helped the researcher to "explain, or elaborate on the quantitative results". Findings of the study showed that pre-service teachers had over-all moderate difficulties during the field observation particularly on students, assigned tasks and learning environment. Findings of the study were substantiated through in-depth discussions of qualitative data. Implications were determined for continued enhancements of the practicum component that can help bridge the theory – practice nexus in pre-service teacher education, and contribute to the development of teachers' professional competencies.

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1. INTRODUCTION

As a legal framework of Philippine higher education system, Higher Education Act of 1994 [1] declares under Section 2 that, "The State shall protect, foster and promote the right of all citizens to affordable quality education at all levels and shall take appropriate steps to ensure that education shall be accessible to all" (sec. 2). It also provides for the advancement of learning as well as the education of professionals. Similarly, it calls for state-supported institutions of higher learning to direct their programs to national, regional or local development plans.

In consonance with RA No. 7722, undergraduate teacher education in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) throughout the country continuously prepares prospective teachers of basic education sector to fulfil their roles and responsibilities and helps sustain quality education. Teacher education programs [2] work for the "highest standards of objectives, components and processes of teacher education curriculum" (p.1). Thus, the Commission on Higher Education Memorandum Order (CMO) No. 30, s. 2004, which primarily

rationalizes the undergraduate teacher education to be attuned to global trends and complexities, heightens the policies and standards for undergraduate teacher education curriculum.

1.1. Field-Based Observation as Integral Part of Teacher Education Curriculum

Field-based observation has been implemented by public and private HEIs offering teacher education programs in the country to have meaningful exposures in actual learning environment and gain profound understanding and appreciation of future practicum experiences as well as teaching profession.This implementation of field experiences is an option to the traditional classroom observation programs adopted in the past.

Field-based observation in cooperating schools is part of Experiential Learning Courses (ELC) which are fundamental and critical aspects of teacher education curriculum [3]. As one of the ELC, Field Study (FS) 6 entitled On Becoming a Teacher is aligned to professional education course The Teaching Profession which is mandated by CMO 30, s. 2004. Like the other FS courses, FS 6 develops competencies found in the National Competency-Based Teacher Standards (NCBTS) and CMO No. 30, s. 2004. It also serves as a guide to becoming an effective teacher as reflected in the Teacher Education and Development Map in the pre-service education [4].

Under Article V, Sec. 13 of CMO 30, s. 2004 [2], it states that "Field Study (FS) courses are intended to provide students with practical learning experiences in which they observe, verify, reflect on, and actually experience different components of teaching-learning processes in actual school settings". In this case, practical experiences will begun with field observation and gradually intensify until students undertake practice teaching" (p. 5). As such, the interface of theory and practice through the proliferation of field-based experiences [5] becomes a crucial part of pre-service education [6].

The present study dealt with the concluding field-based observation in line with FS 6 of the Bachelor of Secondary Education (BSEd) fourth year pre-service teachers under various programs or areas of specializations such as English, Mathematics, Music, Arts, Physical Education and Health (MAPEH), Islamic Education and Technical and Livelihood Education (TLE). This field experience covers 17-hour off-campus observation period that allows pre-service teachers "to observe in actual settings, analyze the experience and reflect on the experience" (5 p. ix).

1.2. Pre-service Teachers' Challenges

It is highly desirable to emphasize the importance of field-based observation in teacher education. During this field activity, pre-service teachers build work relationship with cooperating teachers to plan lessons, prepare projects, assess student knowledge, learn varied teaching styles and effective classroom management [7], and develop their teaching skills and knowledge in a classroom setting [6],[8],[9]. Thus, they become aware of problems and issues concerning teaching practice, undergo process of becoming a professional [8], master skills beneficial to teaching profession [5],[8] and learn specific types of behaviours through good teachers [10].

Though such field observation is definitely a helpful element of pre-service education, there are restraining forces that affect its implementation towards quality and impact of a field experience [11]. In effect, investigating the challenges faced by pre-service teachers during field observation in their final schooling year could provide insights in their early professional steps. Some of these challenges expressed as difficulties include tensions [12], varied experiences, opinions, beliefs and conceptions of teaching and learning [13], basic understanding of the secondary school culture and context for teaching and learning [12], interaction with students, awareness of teaching skills and techniques, reflective thinking during the initial stages of the pre-service academic program, and practical teaching resources.

Based on available foreign and local studies reviewed, almost all considered pre-service field experience as teaching practicum and not as field observation in cooperating schools. These studies included, among others, comparative study on school practitioners' and university staff members' perceptions of pre-service teacher education practicum [14], pre-service teachers' reflection on teaching actions in implementing on-campus microteaching [5], comparison of two supervisory models in a pre-service teaching practicum [15], administration of off-campus student teaching [16], tracing the development of pre-service teachers ' efficacy beliefs in teaching mathematics during fieldwork [17], assessment of pre-service language teachers' practicum observation forms [3], impact of the school-based practicum on pre-service teachers' affective development in mathematics [6], incorporation of pre-service teachers as 'communities of practice' [12], and problems of College coordinator in an off-campus student teaching program [18].

Some studies on pre-service education focused on other aspects like pre-service teacher perceptions of mentor teachers' developing use of mentoring skills [19], perceptions of pre-service teachers on innovations [7], categories of questioning used by preservice teachers during diagnostic mathematics

interviews [20], and effect of field experience during elementary methods courses on pre-service teacher behavior [21].

Having encountered difficulties during field-based observation, pre-service teachers from different major fields have been made aware of initial adjustments from in-campus experience to off-campus exposure. The presence of challenges encountered by pre-service teachers will necessitate rethinking and reform to enhance the conduct of future field-based observations leading to successful practicum. Implications from the study findings are explored in preparation for improved practicum teaching in particular and teacher education program in general.

Literatures and studies are scarce regarding pre-service teachers' perceptions of difficulties during field-based observation in their respective cooperating schools. Hence, the present study aimed at addressing this research gap to contribute to a body of knowledge on off-campus observation experiences. Specifically, the study tried to identify and explain the difficulties encountered by pre-service teachers during field-based observations in the areas of administrative support, cooperating teachers, student supervisors, students, peers/co-pre-service teachers, assigned tasks, and learning environment. It also drew the implications of these difficulties in the enhancement of practice teaching among pre-service teachers.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

An explanatory sequential mixed methods research design was used in the study. Using explanatory sequential design involves two-phase process – collecting and analyzing quantitative data first followed by collecting qualitative data to expound the quantitative findings [22]. The underlying purpose of this design is that results in the first phase give a general picture of the research problem but such are inadequate by themselves. Particularly, "there is a need to build on the quantitative results, through qualitative data collection, in order to refine, extend, or explain the general picture" (p. 395) [23].

The primary form of data collection, i.e., survey questionnaire, was prioritized and supported by the secondary form of data collection, i.e. Focus Group Interview (FGI) and Key Informant Interview (KII) [22] to explain more the quantitative outcome results, understand better their difficulties not provided in the primary data source and substantiate further responses.

For quantitative phase, the study surveyed 136 participants consisting of five groups of graduating pre-service teachers majoring in English, Islamic Education (IE), Music, Arts, Physical Education and Health (MAPEH), Mathematics, and Technical and Livelihood Education (TLE) under Bachelor of Secondary Education (BSEd) degree program at the Cotabato City State Polytechnic College (CCSPC), a Teacher Education Institution (TEI) in Cotabato City, Southern Philippines. These pre-service teachers took up Field Study (FS) 6 as their last field observation course before practice teaching. For qualitative phase, 10 pre-service teachers, six student supervisors, 10 cooperating teachers, and two school principals were interviewed.

Sequential mixed-method sampling was utilized in selecting quantitative sample using probability sampling (stratified random sampling technique) and qualitative sample using purposive sampling strategies, one after the other [24]. Slovin's formula at .05 alpha level was also used to calculate the sample size for survey questionnaire. In the use of mixed method research design, Graff [24] suggests that participants are chosen on the bases of "who can provide or yield data that will address the research problem" (p. 54). Citing Geertz (1973), Graff [24] pointed out that "When generating sample for qualitative phase, researchers typically seek to establish samples that will provide information at multiple levels of meaning, or a "thick description" (p. 55).

The research instrument, composed of three parts, was researcher-constructed. Part I elicited basic information about pre-service students' profile. Part II inquired on challenges during pre-service field-based observation. These observation difficulties covered 52 indicators reflecting seven critical support areas such as administrative support, cooperating teachers/mentors, student supervisors, students, peers/co-student teachers, assigned tasks and learning environment. These areas were assessed for their extent of difficulty by using the rating scale: 1-Not a Difficulty; 2- Slight Difficulty; 3-Moderate Difficulty; and 4- Big Difficulty.

For Part III, interview schedules were made for FGI of pre-service teachers and student supervisors and for KII of cooperating teachers and school principals to validate the results of the survey and obtain more information on the items enumerated in the questionnaire. Citing Kendall (2008), Harris and Brown [25] noted that "While questionnaires can provide evidence of patterns among large population, qualitative interview data gather more in depth insights on participants' attitudes, thoughts and actions (p.1)".

The statistical procedures of determining the validity and reliability of survey questionnaire were followed through computer software program. The four phases of development suggested by Benson and Clark [26] show the steps of planning, constructing, evaluating, and checking to see if the questions work,

i.e., validating a research tool. The fundamental steps comprised of reviewing the literature, presenting general questions to a target group, constructing questions for the item pool, and pilot testing the items.

Education experts and practitioners in the fields of English, Islamic Education, MAPEH, Mathematics and TLE validated the survey instrument using four criteria: (a) conformity with the objectives, (b) clarity and construction, (c) level of difficulty, and (d) relevance and suitability [27]. The experts did not reject any of the items; however, they recommended for rewording of two items and putting additional phrase to one item in areas of administrative support and pre-service coordinators. Based on these recommendations, the items were then refined and finalized to satisfy the validation criteria.

After the content validation, the survey instrument was tested for its reliability utilizing Split-Half Method and Spearman Brown formula. Furthermore, as suggested by Cronbach [28], the baseline of a coefficient that reaches 0.60 and above is reliable. This also upholds the notion of scholars that an instrument proven highly reliable using correlation index is also highly valid. The survey instrument was pilot tested to 20 pre-service teachers. The coefficient value obtained was 0.86, which is interpreted as highly reliable, implying that the instrument has consistency.

Quantitative data were analyzed to address the specific problems of the study. Mean was utilized to describe the extent of difficulty faced by pre-service teachers in terms of administrative support, cooperating teachers, student supervisors, observed students, peers/co-pre-service teachers, assigned tasks and learning environment. Based on the descriptive analysis, qualitative in-depth analysis was done to generate more contextual data, and further probe the key issues that had emerged from the quantitative data [29]. This sequential data analysis is conducted "when quantitative –qualitative phases of a study are in chronological order" (p. 60) [24].

3. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

3.1. On Administrative Support

Table 1 shows the extent of difficulty concerning support of school administrators. There are two items where pre-service teachers had "moderate difficulty" such as access to school facilities (1.82) and participation in personal and professional development (1.92).

Table 1. Difficulties related to administrative support (n=136)

Items	Mean Scores of Level of Difficulty						
	ENG	MATH	IE	TLE	MAPEH	Overall Mean	Description
1. access to school facilities (library, computer laboratory, instructional devices, etc.)	1.86	1.28	2.44	1.82	1.69	1.82	Moderate Difficulty
2. participation in personal and professional development of pre-service teachers	2.00	1.56	2.33	1.94	1.77	1.92	Moderate Difficulty
3. involvement of pre-service teachers to activities in and out of the school	1.71	1.39	1.89	1.47	1.49	1.59	No Difficulty
4. provision of security and safety for pre-service teachers	1.71	1.28	1.89	1.47	1.62	1.59	No Difficulty
5. principal's work relationship between cooperating teachers and pre-service teachers	1.33	1.17	2.44	1.47	1.69	1.62	No Difficulty

Note: ENG (English), MATH (Mathematics), IE (Islamic Education), TLE (Technology and Livelihood Education), MAPEH (Music, Arts, Physical Education, and Health)
Interpretation: 1.00-1.75 – (ND or No Difficulty); 1.76-2.50 – (MD or Moderate Difficulty); 2.51-3.25 – (BD or Big Difficulty); 3.26-4.00 – (SD or Serious Difficulty)

According to school principals during KII, there was provision for pre-service teachers or mentees to use the computer laboratory, library and other teaching devices only when students do not use them and when proper coordination is done with concerned school personnel. School heads really wanted pre-service teachers to enjoy full access to school resources but they could not accommodate them all the time because of limited school equipment and other facilities and large population of students who utilize such facilities.

Cooperating schools conducted school activities but participation of pre-service teachers in most of these activities was not required during field-based observation period. As a support system, school principals along with department chairpersons readily initiated an orientation session regarding observation

policies, assignment of classes and responsibilities as well as formal introduction to assigned mentors and students to ensure a successful observation experience. But they knew that it was still insufficient to prepare pre-service teachers in their observation tasks. They contended that Teacher Education Institutions (TEIs) have the prime responsibility to orient their pre-service teachers for off-campus work and determine their potentials and readiness for practice teaching.

3.2. On Cooperating Teachers

Table 2 shows the indicators showing extent of difficulty on cooperating teachers or mentors. It reveals that pre-service teachers experienced "moderate difficulty" in terms of work relationship (1.81), interpersonal skills (1.76), classroom management (1.94), teaching approaches (1.80), and instructional materials (1.77).

There were instances when work and interpersonal relationships between cooperating teachers (mentors) and pre-service teachers (mentees) were affected. Some pre-service teachers faced intimidation problem. During KII, cooperating teachers confirmed how some mentees felt frightened even by the voice and facial expression of their mentors. Though there were some attitudinal problems in mentors, they shared that some of the mentees demonstrated undesirable actions and values, too. They expressed their frustration over pre-service teachers' tardiness and improper conduct, i.e. asking them to sign attendance form for one time only when it should have been done right after each observation session. Thus, mentors stressed strict observance of punctuality and discipline among pre-service teachers. In addition, they highlighted the late deployment of pre-service teachers in their schools and absence of proper sending-off program. Despite some shortcomings of their mentees, most of them were considerate and helpful in providing guidance and support for better observation experience.

Table 2. Difficulties related to cooperating teachers (n=136)

	Items	Mean Scores of Level of Difficulty						
		ENG	MATH	IE	TLE	MAPEH	Overall Mean	Description
1.	coaching or mentoring of pre-service teachers	2.19	1.17	2.11	1.45	1.77	1.74	No Difficulty
2.	approachability	1.90	1.11	2.22	1.51	1.62	1.67	No Difficulty
3.	patience	1.86	1.11	2.33	1.39	1.56	1.65	No Difficulty
4.	work relationship	1.90	1.33	2.56	1.49	1.79	1.81	Moderate Difficulty
5.	interpersonal skills	1.95	1.44	2.22	1.51	1.67	1.76	ModerateDifficulty
6.	punctuality	1.62	1.28	2.00	1.41	1.49	1.56	No Difficulty
7.	teaching competence	1.67	1.56	1.67	1.61	1.62	1.63	No Difficulty
8.	classroom management	2.19	1.56	2.11	1.88	1.97	1.94	ModerateDifficulty
9.	teaching approaches / methods / techniques	1.81	1.50	2.33	1.55	1.79	1.80	ModerateDifficulty
10.	instructional materials	1.86	1.61	1.89	1.63	1.85	1.77	ModerateDifficulty
11.	student evaluation	1.67	1.33	2.00	1.57	1.85	1.68	No Difficulty
12.	communication skills	2.00	1.33	2.11	1.57	1.69	1.74	No Difficulty

Note: ENG (English), MATH (Mathematics), IE (Islamic Education), TLE (Technology and Livelihood Education), MAPEH (Music, Arts, Physical Education, and Health)

Interpretation: 1.00-1.75 – (ND or No Difficulty); 1.76-2.50 – (MD or Moderate Difficulty); 2.51-3.25 – (BD or Big Difficulty); 3.26-4.00 – (SD or Serious Difficulty)

In an FGI with pre-service teachers, they related how their humiliation experience from their cooperating teachers contributed to undesirable work condition. They admitted that some of them showed shyness, lapses and low self-confidence so they were not so ready to adapt to new observation tasks. They added that unfriendly communication manner and favoritism of mentors as well as absence of proper orientation in the conduct of observation triggered unsatisfactory interpersonal relations. Moreover, on the issue of teaching during observation period, some favored handling their mentors' classes for valid reasons (e.g., sick leave, attendance to seminars). What they negatively commented was when they taught classes even though their mentors were just around the campus and when they substituted even during Saturday and night class sessions. They also felt offended when their performance was compared to pre-service teachers from other TEIs.

Furthermore, one pre-service teacher shared how she always fought her nervousness whenever she was with her mentor. Another one related her discouragement and reluctance to observe due to her mentor's perfectionist character. Some cooperating teachers confirmed such perfectionist and inconsiderate mentors for reasons they did not divulge. In this case, instead of getting inspired to do observation tasks, some pre-service teachers thought they were not guided properly; thus, building a gap between them.

Results indicate also the problem on classroom management as observed by pre-service teachers. Some cooperating teachers could not completely control noisiness and unruliness of students due to overpopulated classrooms. School principals mentioned that overcrowdedness was attributed to the policy of not rejecting any student from enrolling in their school and to lack of classrooms. Additionally, some cooperating teachers had a hard time managing students from all walks of life and with diverse needs and interests. In this situation, they tried using differentiated instruction which required time, efforts and material resources to attain learning outcomes. However, despite their efforts there were still misbehaving students who openly showed rudeness, inattentiveness and passivity in class. When such misbehaviors persisted, they just tended to ignore them. One cooperating teacher opined that the Child Protection Policy implementation may or may not be a factor for maintaining good classroom management.

Similarly, findings suggest that some cooperating teachers had a predicament on teaching approaches that somehow affected the attainment of quality learning. Some pre-service teachers observed that their mentors endeavored to implement the K to 12 curriculum that requires experiential activities, learner-centered strategies, performance-based assessments, and holistic teaching approach to attain various learning competencies. The mentors themselves shared that some K to 12 learning experiences were not suitable to abilities and interests of students especially from lower sections. In this case, learning tasks in the new curriculum could not be totally followed; consequently, learning outcomes would not be effectively achieved. Also, it is even alarming that the present K to 12 curriculum reform was not yet fully understood and internalized by most pre-service teachers. On one hand, the pre-service teachers observed that some mentors handling students with unwanted attitudes employed varied teaching strategies to motivate them to participate in class activities. On the other hand, other mentors still used traditional teaching due to their unpreparedness for the day's lessons, laziness in engaging students in various learning experiences, and unwillingness to teach troublesome students.

During KII with cooperating teachers, they cited the lack of teaching guides, learners' materials and textbooks as well as inadequacy of classroom facilities in their respective schools. This finding is consistent with perennial dilemma on school facilities facing the public schools in the country. It was brought out also that Arabic Language and Islamic Values Education (ALIVE) subjects had no budget for instructional materials. Some teachers provided their own materials while others could not afford to buy. One pre-service teacher observed that students in some classes had no books, only their teachers. This inadequacy of technology resources, which must be addressed to sustain good pedagogical practices and quality learning among students, was affirmed by school heads and cooperating teachers.

3.3. On Student Supervisors

As gleaned in Table 3, pre-service teachers encountered "moderate difficulty" towards their supervisors on five items: mentoring strategies (1.80), conduct of meetings (1.80), assigning of tasks (1.83), leadership (1.81), and monitoring (1.81).

Table 3. Difficulties related to pre-service coordinators (n=136)

	Items	Mean Scores of Level of Difficulty						
		ENG	MATH	IE	TLE	MAPEH	Overall Mean	Description
1.	mentoring strategies	1.90	1.67	2.11	1.67	1.64	1.80	Moderate Difficulty
2.	conduct of meetings	1.48	1.94	2.00	1.61	1.97	1.80	Moderate Difficulty
3.	assigning of tasks	1.62	1.61	2.22	1.69	2.03	1.83	ModerateDifficulty
4.	leadership	1.67	1.56	2.44	1.59	1.79	1.81	Moderate Difficulty
5.	fairness	1.57	1.28	2.11	1.61	1.62	1.64	No Difficulty
6.	work relationship	1.67	1.33	2.00	1.49	1.72	1.64	No Difficulty
7.	coordination	1.71	1.44	2.00	1.57	1.72	1.69	No Difficulty
8.	communication skills	1.71	1.39	2.22	1.55	1.67	1.71	No Difficulty
9.	monitoring of pre-service teachers	1.86	1.56	2.22	1.61	1.82	1.81	Moderate Difficulty

Note: ENG (English), MATH (Mathematics), IE (Islamic Education), TLE (Technology and Livelihood Education), MAPEH (Music, Arts, Physical Education, and Health)
Interpretation: 1.00-1.75 – (ND or No Difficulty); 1.76-2.50 – (MD or Moderate Difficulty); 2.51-3.25 – (BD or Big Difficulty); 3.26-4.00 – (SD or Serious Difficulty)

During FGI, all student supervisors claimed that good mentoring through meetings and workshops guides' pre-service teachers in performing their tasks. However, one supervisor recalled non-holding of mentoring sessions and some expressed the lack of regular orientation meetings and seminar-workshops given to pre-service students, thereby depriving the latter to understand clearly the purposes of a field-based

observation and their roles as mentees. In consonance with this was the observation of cooperating teachers and pre-service teachers that student supervisors lacked clear implementation plan and timelines for a 17-hour field-based observation.

In terms of meetings, two supervisors narrated the absence of regular meetings with their colleagues to plan, implement and monitor field observation. The briefing before pre-service teachers' deployment in cooperating schools was not enough to prepare students in their off-campus observation. Regarding the absence of post conference, a supervisor attributed it to hectic schedules of pre-service teachers. But for some pre-service teachers and their mentors, they asserted that such failure was caused by lack of workplan throughout the duration of observation. Accordingly, some cooperating teachers cited the lack of focus and obvious unpreparedness of pre-service teachers during field-based observation. As a whole, student supervisors realized how essential the meetings are to address relevant concerns and share good practices observed by pre-service teachers in their respective schools. In fact, supervisors believed that if pre-service teachers are overloaded with tasks or assigned with wrong tasks, they may burn out and get discouraged in performing their real school tasks.

Regarding task assignments, the pre-service teachers commented on some supervisors who were not systematic in giving assignments. They also shared that some supervisors gave late information in the submission of requirements related to observation.

Moreover, pre-service teachers were excited to observe and reflect on their experiences which they believed would serve as training ground for practice teaching. However, they expressed that supervisors failed to effectively lead them during their scheduled observations outside the College (TEI). They were quite dismayed because they expected a lot of support from supervisors. This situation was consistent with the response of two supervisors who noted the absence of overall supervisor that will collaborate with and coordinate planned activities to English, Islamic Education, MAPEH, Mathematics and TLE supervisors.

Cooperating teachers and pre-service teachers alike emphasized that supervisors should conduct quality monitoring of field-based observation. Pre-service teachers remarked that only very few of them were monitored in their respective schools for the whole duration of observation. Likewise, one supervisor cited the absence of a monitoring system as proven by absence of concrete program of activities and monitoring instruments for all five programs.

Based on the foregoing statements, student supervisors failed to fully exercise some of their mandated functions in supervising pre-service students. The identified items were critical in the success of a field-based experience. Logically, if these attributes are fully provided, they can factor in for a meaningful field-based observation program.

3.4. On Students

As Table 4 illustrates, the pre-service respondents revealed that they encountered "moderate difficulty" in almost all indicators (6 out of 7) in observing students' behaviors and performance inside the class.

Table 4. Difficulties related to students (n=136)

Items	Mean Scores of Level of Difficulty						
	ENG	MATH	IE	TLE	MAPEH	Overall Mean	Description
1. students' level of understanding of lessons	2.67	2.11	2.33	1.92	2.03	2.21	Moderate Difficulty
2. students' participation in class activities	2.67	1.61	2.33	2.06	2.05	2.14	ModerateDifficulty
3. students' attitudes and behaviours	2.86	2.28	2.89	2.57	2.41	2.60	Big Difficulty
4. students' motivation to learn	2.52	1.94	2.33	2.08	2.08	2.19	Moderate Difficulty
5. students' social interaction in class	2.62	1.67	2.33	1.94	1.95	2.10	Moderate Difficulty
6. students' performance of class responsibilities	2.62	2.00	2.44	2.10	2.13	2.26	Moderate Difficulty
7. students' attention or focus in class	3.00	2.17	2.33	2.27	2.15	2.38	Moderate Difficulty

Note: ENG (English), MATH (Mathematics), IE (Islamic Education), TLE (Technology and Livelihood Education), MAPEH (Music, Arts, Physical Education, and Health)
Interpretation: 1.00-1.75 – (ND or No Difficulty); 1.76-2.50 – (MD or Moderate Difficulty); 2.51-3.25 – (BD or Big Difficulty); 3.26-4.00 – (SD or Serious Difficulty)

Interestingly, the respondents had "big difficulty" on students' attitudes and behaviours (2.60). Problems faced by public school system like overcrowded classrooms, lack of facilities, teachers' incompetence, poor class management, and lack of commitment are contributory to students' misbehaviors and deteriorating academic performance. Due to diversity of students, teachers were challenged to create an interactive class atmosphere, encourage active students' involvement and utilize varied teaching-learning approaches and techniques.

According to pre-service teachers, classroom environment became not advantageous to learning and students remained passive or unruly if instructional interventions were inappropriate to students' level of knowledge, interests, needs and abilities. The school principals acknowledged, too, the presence of mischievous and ill-mannered students whom they believed needed more assistance, patience and understanding on the part of the teachers.

3.5. On Peers/Co-Pre-service Teachers

The data shown in Table 5 provides a picture of how pre-service teachers worked with peers. It reveals that teamwork was perceived as "moderately difficult" (1.77). The pre-service teachers showed good indicators of personal and professional growth since they had no problems on interpersonal relationship (1.61), concern and understanding (1.68), attitudes towards peers (1.72), and moral support to peers (1.62).

The pre-service teachers thought that teamwork problem may be attributed to failure of formulating and implementing a unified program of activities where all of them from five programs could work together and engage in relevant activities approved by the College. Both pre-service teachers and cooperating teachers claimed that supervisors had no organized activity program and no proper coordination with fellow supervisors. Likewise, the pre-service teachers reiterated the absence of regular meetings and post-conferences which put to risk the essence of teamwork among them. In effect, they were unable to share their negative and positive observations as a group. For them, their unity was not successfully realized within the duration of their observation sessions.

Table 5. Difficulties related to peers/co – pre-service teachers (n=136)

		Mean Scores of Level of Difficulty						
	Items	ENG	MATH	IE	TLE	MAPEH	Overall Mean	Description
1.	interpersonal relationship	1.43	1.56	2.11	1.39	1.54	1.61	No Difficulty
2.	concern and understanding	1.57	1.44	2.11	1.57	1.72	1.68	No Difficulty
3.	attitudes towards peers	1.81	1.56	1.89	1.65	1.67	1.72	No Difficulty
4.	teamwork	1.81	1.33	2.33	1.53	1.85	1.77	Moderate Difficulty
5.	moral support to peers	1.57	1.22	1.78	1.73	1.82	1.62	No Difficulty

Note: ENG (English), MATH (Mathematics), IE (Islamic Education), TLE (Technology and Livelihood Education), MAPEH (Music, Arts, Physical Education, and Health)

Interpretation: 1.00-1.75 – (ND or No Difficulty); 1.76-2.50 – (MD or Moderate Difficulty); 2.51-3.25 – (BD or Big Difficulty); 3.26-4.00 – (SD or Serious Difficulty)

3.6. On Assigned Tasks

Table 6 illustrates the pre-service teachers' difficulties towards their assigned tasks. It shows that almost all indicators were rated as "moderately difficult" except for guidance of teachers in fulfilling the tasks (1.68) perceived as "no difficulty". Although they are guided in doing the tasks, the pre-service teachers found those tasks challenging. This finding points out two issues. First, the pre-service teachers were not so skilled and well-prepared to perform the tasks given to them by mentors and supervisors. Second, cooperating teachers gave them tasks beyond their expectations during observation periods. For instance, it was a big problem for those pre-service teachers who lacked knowledge on topics to be taught instantly. Expectedly, this type of task was not refused by some of them; however, they felt uncomfortable and tensed for lack of preparation. But some cooperating teachers explained that they let their mentees handle their classes only when necessary, when there is advance notice to them and supervisors and when their absence in class is officially approved by the school principal.

During FGI, the pre-service teachers explained that their other professional and major courses in the College were taken up simultaneously with field observation as a Field Study course mandated in the curriculum. This situation affected somehow the number and type of tasks they could complete and manage as prescribed by their subject teachers and cooperating teachers. They tried performing their field-observation tasks while, at the same time, completing course requirements in all subjects. Similarly, they were not exempted from participating in College programs and activities which needed time for rehearsal or

dry-run. Therefore, it was hard for them to cope with responsibilities in the College and in their cooperating schools.

The pre-service teachers being new to off-campus observation had to adjust their routines and hone their skills required in observation tasks. However, due to laziness of some to submit requirements on time, they had trouble coping with late preparations of portfolios, assignments and other projects. Their lack of time management was a contributing factor to inefficient task performance.

Table 6. Difficulties related to assigned tasks (n=136)

Items	Mean Scores of Level of Difficulty						
	ENG	MATH	IE	TLE	MAPEH	Overall Mean	Description
1. amount of class or school tasks	2.10	1.72	2.33	1.80	2.00	1.99	Moderate Difficulty
2. types of class or school tasks	2.10	1.89	2.00	1.90	1.90	1.96	Moderate Difficulty
3. amount of time to fulfil the tasks	2.33	2.00	2.33	1.63	2.15	2.09	Moderate Difficulty
4. management of tasks	2.33	1.67	2.00	1.80	2.05	1.97	Moderate Difficulty
5. completion of tasks	2.24	1.72	2.00	1.82	1.97	1.95	Moderate Difficulty
6. skills needed to perform the tasks	2.33	1.67	2.44	1.78	1.79	2.00	Moderate Difficulty
7. guidance of cooperating teachers in fulfilling the tasks	2.05	1.44	1.44	1.61	1.85	1.68	No Difficulty

Note: ENG (English), MATH (Mathematics), IE (Islamic Education), TLE (Technology and Livelihood Education), MAPEH (Music, Arts, Physical Education, and Health)
Interpretation: 1.00-1.75 – (ND or No Difficulty); 1.76-2.50 – (MD or Moderate Difficulty); 2.51-3.25 – (BD or Big Difficulty); 3.26-4.00 – (SD or Serious Difficulty)

3.7. On Learning Environment

Table 7 depicts the condition of learning environment where pre-service teachers had their first maximized exposure on actual teaching-learning process. As shown in the Table, majority of indicators were rated as "moderately difficult". Except for lighting, ventilation and security and safety, pre-service teachers had dilemma on key elements in creating a facilitating learning environment.

Table 7. Difficulties related to learning environment (n=136)

Items	Mean Scores of Level of Difficulty						
	ENG	MATH	IE	TLE	MAPEH	Overall Mean	Description
1. student-teacher ratio	2.29	1.67	2.00	1.71	1.87	1.91	Moderate Difficulty
2. classroom size	2.19	1.44	2.22	1.84	1.74	1.89	Moderate Difficulty
3. classroom facilities	2.38	1.39	2.22	1.92	1.85	1.95	Moderate Difficulty
4. classroom atmosphere	2.33	1.44	2.22	1.88	1.85	1.94	Moderate Difficulty
5. lighting or illumination	1.86	1.33	1.89	1.67	1.72	1.69	No Difficulty
6. ventilation	2.10	1.39	1.78	1.63	1.74	1.73	No Difficulty
7. security and safety	1.86	1.33	2.00	1.79	1.69	1.73	No Difficulty

Note: ENG (English), MATH (Mathematics), IE (Islamic Education), TLE (Technology and Livelihood Education), MAPEH (Music, Arts, Physical Education, and Health)
Interpretation: 1.00-1.75 – (ND or No Difficulty); 1.76-2.50 – (MD or Moderate Difficulty); 2.51-3.25 – (BD or Big Difficulty); 3.26-4.00 – (SD or Serious Difficulty)

The finding supports the persisting problem on classroom environment in public schools as mentioned in Table 1 and Table 2. According to pre-service teachers, there were overcrowded rooms, small classrooms, inadequate classrooms, inadequate chairs, insufficient library references, and inadequate laboratory equipment and facilities. Such problems were also recognized by school principals and cooperating teachers implying that budget to purchase school facilities was either very minimal or unavailable. They all pointed out how valuable these resources are, thus ignoring them may result to ineffective teaching and learning.

According to them, managing a large number of students in a small classroom and a passive class atmosphere was quite difficult. This situation would have an effect on students' attitudes towards learning. Also, the pre-service teachers believed that if learning environment remains unfavorable, minor and major behavioral problems would most likely emerge in class. As observed by them, when there are noisy classes and irresponsible students, additional problems take place which were sometimes left unattended by teachers

not because of intentional neglect but due to pressures and anxieties of teaching too many groups of students with diverse backgrounds and experiences. Realizing the importance of conducive learning environment, school principals and cooperating teachers were doing everything to solve other issues on student-teacher ratio and classroom size through linkaging with other agencies or institutions as partners for physical development of their schools. However, it is worth mentioning that safety and security aspect was not a problem and this has been a great factor why parents still continue sending their children to schools.

3.8. Implications to Practice Teaching

Field-based observation is a significant element of teacher education program that provides pre-service teachers first actual experience of entering into the world of formal school setting where work relationships, teacher-student interactions, preparation of class activities, classroom management, and adapting to physical and social environment become one's daily routine. In this case, field observation helps facilitate pre-service teachers to learn and reflect for their future practice teaching tasks.

There are varied perceptions related to difficulties of pre-service teachers from different major programs (English, IE, Math, MAPEH, and TLE). Nonetheless, the dominant problems on students, learning environment and assigned tasks are issues to contemplate and resolve urgently. Such difficulties in various aspects of field observation may block the enhancement of field experiences like practicum. Based on KII and FGI results, a gap existed between teaching-learning practices applied in actual classroom setting and those concepts taught in field study courses. This is alarming on the part of the TEI concerned and cooperating schools and a wake-up call for everyone involved in field-based experiences.

If those difficulties continue to prevail, two things may happen: First, pre-service teachers may heighten their discontentment on field observation experience and decrease their morale towards practicum. The prevalence of difficulties had affected them personally. With such difficulties, they felt confused and uncertain if they themselves could manage and make it as future teachers. Second, such difficulties may be accepted as positive challenges to make them more determined to readily face the rigors of practice teaching. For them, they only have one remaining semester before graduation so they just need to strive harder in pursuit of successful practicum.

Field-based observation results to either positive or negative challenges. Pre-service teachers did not underestimate both helpful and disastrous effects of problems. Exposures to on-site observations brought them insightful learning experiences which they could maximize to adjust in a real classroom situation for their practicum activity. The difficulties they observed may serve as eye-openers in their journey towards improved practice teaching. However, considering the negative effects of difficulties, genuine reforms are needed in the conduct of field-based observation as vital component of teacher education program. Afterall, field observation is not only for degree program compliance but for future professional development as well.

The moderate level of difficulty given to areas on students, assigned tasks and learning environment directly involved cooperating schools. Accordingly, this may call for sustained partnership between cooperating schools and the TEI so that they could act together on problems faced by pre-service teachers. Similarly, field study courses prior to practice teaching in teacher education curriculum, need to be strengthened. The theory-practice gap could be addressed by student supervisors and mentors through good planning, implementation, supervision and monitoring of pre-service teachers assigned in different school sites. In addition, having a clear mindset and positive attitudes could boost pre-service teachers' morale to move forward to a more challenging experience, i.e., practice teaching. Thus, completing the number of hours for field observation alone does not guarantee success in practice teaching, but it is more on how observation time was used wisely.

Furthermore, unproblematic field observation facilitates the development of values, skills and knowledge needed in teaching. It trains pre-service teachers to become role models in terms of discipline, patience, passion, commitment, diligence, readiness, flexibility, self-confidence, responsibility, accountability, culture sensitivity, resourcefulness, creativity, teamwork, perseverance, and reflective skills. These are indispensable characteristics and competencies of pre-service teachers to prepare them in practice teaching. They could be better oriented and more prepared for teaching roles and responsibilities [30] during the succeeding practicum in their respective cooperating schools. In general, the pre-service teachers along with school principals, cooperating teachers and student supervisors acknowledged that less problematic, if not problem-free, field-based observation is a fundamental requirement to enhance practical teaching experience.

4. CONCLUSION

The present study documented what pre-service teachers regarded as difficulties on administrative support, cooperating teachers, student supervisors, peers, students, assigned tasks and learning environment

during observation time in their cooperating schools. As shown in the findings, these problems vary from one major field to another but generally the observed students, assigned tasks and learning environment were given a "moderate difficulty" rating. Such difficulties were thoroughly substantiated through KII and FGI using multi-level participants, i.e., school principals, cooperating teachers, student supervisors and pre-service teachers.

Through interviews, deeper insights and viewpoints from different participants gave a clear picture of problems associated with off-campus observation. All believed that field-based observation in school sites becomes a worthwhile experience if difficulties in various areas are resolved. They also recognized the positive and negative effects of such difficulties on pre-service teachers. Thus, responsive decisions and actions should be concerted efforts of both TEI and cooperating schools. On one hand, it becomes imperative for TEI to enhance the values, knowledge and skills in pre-service teacher education coursework while providing valuable opportunities in preparation for actual teaching. Reforms in teacher education program require a focus on field study and professional courses for smooth transition to practical teaching and a review of experiential learning policies for a well-directed field-based observation. On the other hand, it is also crucial for cooperating schools and other community stakeholders to serve as a strong support system to immediately address identified difficulties of pre-service teachers during field observation.

Implications of the identified difficulties to practice teaching are thoroughly elaborated to address the mismatch between theory and practice in pre-service teacher education, and contribute to the development of teachers' professional competencies. There is indeed recognition of the usefulness and relevance of a field-based observation in enhancing practice teaching.

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